

DESIGN FOR LOVE

ABOUT THIS BOOK

*F. E. Bail's new romance is an interesting study of family relationship, particularly the relationship between parents and children.**

Roger Heysham, a wealthy London solicitor, and his wife Moira have lived all their married lives in a country village. They have two children, David, aged twenty, and Penny, two years younger.

David cannot get along with his father, who wants him to enter the legal profession. The boy has other ideas, however, and on this issue the friction that has always existed between father and son precipitates a crisis.

Moira, whose ideal is a united family, is heart-broken at this turn of events, and even popular, carefree Penny—her father's darling—can do little to remedy matters.

Roger eventually comes to realize that he must allow his children to work out their own lives, whatever his own ambitions for them.

By the same author

BIOGRAPHIES

Lady Beaconsfield
Sophia of Hanover
Lady Palmerston

Film Stars of History
The Great Victorian Novelists
The Perfect Age

NOVELS

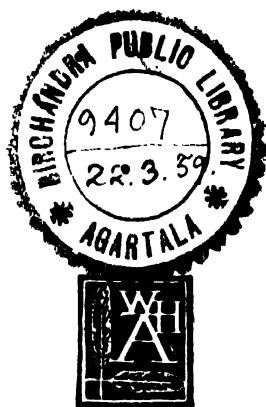
Dolf
It Won't do any Harm
Pleasure Pets
Such Women are Rare
Supper Time
Golden Vanity
Beauty Girl
Tropic Love
Flaming Passion
Wives Must Weep
Fleet Street Girl
Vingie Darling
Enchanted Journey
Stand over Youth
So this is Love
Chaste Interlude
African Nymph
Men are so Susceptible
Mother Says No
Girl Friend
Aunt Anna Steps Out
Keep on Dancing
Treat Them Gently
You Can't do as You Like
Swing Music
Here Comes the Bride

Place in the Sun
This is Life
Trust No Man
Island Rhapsody
Don't Blame the Girl
Three for a Girl
One Girl who left Home
Parents have no Fun
Three Weeks Leave
African Love
Can I Help You?
Men are such Fun
Mother's Daughter
Carol Redmayne
Lancers Lace
Pilgrimage of Grace
Time for Love
Dangerous Marriage
I Loved Him Best
Daughter Knows Better
Never Look Back
Mixed Company
Love Rules the World
Ladies Prefer Love
Lovely Lady

DESIGN FOR LOVE

A ROMANCE BY

F. E. BAILY



W. H. ALLEN

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Chapter One

MORA HEYSHAM, sitting curled up with her legs under her on the window seat of her husband's study, gazed over the semi-circular lawn, bounded by a drive in and out, and the hedge between the house and the road, across one of the finest stretches of farm land in England. It was Autumn, and the wheat had been cut. From the wheat field the ground swept upward in a hill-side, crowned by a forest of beech trees which had now begun to shed their leaves. She might have said, if she had known the lines:

“We'll to the woods no more,
The laurels all are cut,
The bowers are bare of bay
That once the Muses wore;
The year draws in the day
And soon will evening shut:
The laurels all are cut,
We'll to the woods no more.”

She was concluding sadly that her marriage had come to an end to all intents and purposes; not that she and Roger contemplated divorce; it was simply that all the meaning had gone out of their marriage, that living together had become a dull habit, with their children a source of contention between them.

“Materially, I've nothing to grumble about,” she murmured; “spiritually and emotionally my life's completely barren. I suppose Roger's is too, but he doesn't seem to mind, whereas I mind frightfully. But then he has his important job in London, and probably, when he reaches his office, he forgets all about the house and me.”

She still loved the house, in which they had lived all their married lives. It was double-fronted, standing in its own garden, with what had been the stables, and was

now the garage, on the south side, and, rather oddly, a conservatory on the north side. The architect could hardly have been an enthusiastic gardener. The two front rooms, looking over the road which led from the village of Wenton to the county town of Dalesbridge, consisted of Roger's study and the dining-room. At the back, with a french window giving on the lawn and garden, was a large drawing-room with an equally large bedroom over it. This was Roger's and Moira's bedroom, and in it had been born her son David, now aged twenty, and Penelope, known as Penny, now aged eighteen. The rest of the rooms, on the upper floor, comprised Roger's dressing-room, and the bedrooms of Penny, David, and the housekeeper. The kitchen was pleasant and old-fashioned, but Roger, in a burst of efficiency, had installed all the modern kitchen machinery, an extra bathroom, and central heating. Being senior partner in one of the most prosperous firms of solicitors in London, he could afford these luxuries, in spite of modern taxation.

In the course of the years, they had furnished the house very comfortably and attractively, for Roger was a connoisseur of furniture, and Moira had an infallible colour sense. From this house Roger went to London every day, and returned every evening in time for dinner. There had been a time when David did the same, but now he lived in London digs, while Penny stayed at a hostel in London run by a school for mannequins, at which she was training. So, in these days, Moira found herself much alone.

Sitting on the window seat, she reviewed, for the hundredth time, not only her relations with Roger, but his and her relations with David and Penny. As usual, she sighed while she did so, because in these relations there remained very little happiness.

Roger and David failed completely to get on together. Roger, as was, perhaps natural, wanted David to read law, and succeed in time to the senior partnership in

the family firm of solicitors. He had explained over and over again that, in these days of high taxation and the falling value of money, one couldn't afford to throw away the certainty of a good living.

All this had taken place originally when David left Harton, where Roger also had been educated; but the common background of Harton did not seem to lead to a good understanding between David and his father.

"Perhaps," Moira thought wearily, "even Harton has changed, though I thought these old public schools still upheld the ideals of the Tudor period, when a parent's word was law to his children."

The question of reading law had remained in abeyance while David did his military service, but emerged when he left the Army as a National Service officer. He said frankly that the idea of reading law made him feel sick. He wanted to go into journalism, with a view to branching out into television later on. Television, he declared, was the career of the future. As Roger refused to look at television, or have it in the house, this remark hardly helped matters.

In the end, Roger insisted that David should read law, with another firm of solicitors. David, still under age, and dependant on his father, gave way sulkily, but Moira had no very high hopes of David as a solicitor. Since giving way, his personality seemed to have changed. Instead of being a reasonably cheerful creature, he had become sullen and morose. After a great deal of tactful persuasion on Moira's part, Roger had agreed grudgingly to letting David live in London in a one-room flatlet.

"It's no place for an inexperienced boy of twenty," he had grumbled, to which Moira had replied:

"He's been two years in the Army, dear, and served in Germany, and earned a commission, and got used to responsibility. He's met all sorts of people, women as well as men I dare say, and he's not a child."

"Very well," Roger had rejoined. "But if anything goes wrong with him in London, you must take

the blame. It's your idea that he should live there."

In fact, it was David's idea. Moira and he were very much in sympathy, and David had said frankly:

"I simply can't go on living in this house with father week after week. He hates me because I don't want to be a solicitor, and I hate him because he won't let me do the job I want to do. If I'm stuck here with him we shall always be quarrelling, and that'll make things pretty miserable for you. Penny, of course, would be out of it, except for the week-ends. Father never made any bones about letting *her* train for what she wanted to do, and live in London, but then she's his girl-friend. Not that I blame her for getting what she wants from him. I only wish I could do the same, but sex counts, even in families. You don't get on with Penny anything like as well as you get on with me. And as for my being too young to live in London on my own, Penny's two years younger than I am. And after serving with the Army of the Rhine, there isn't much I don't know. If father supposes there aren't any girls in Germany, he doesn't know as much as he thinks he does."

So, for the sake of peace, Moira had persuaded Roger to pay the rent of David's one-room flatlet, and give him a reasonable allowance, on condition that he read law. David had agreed unwillingly on the question of reading law. Privately, he had told Moira that at the first opportunity he would give up law and start on his own. "But," he explained, "I have to look round first. At the moment I know very few chaps in London, and none of them can give me an introduction to a newspaper."

Roger also made the condition that David should come home every week-end, "so that one can keep an eye on him." From time to time David didn't come home for the week-end, and then the father-son quarrel flared up again. Penny came home dutifully each Friday night. She liked the country air for a change, and she had a favourite boy-friend in Wenton who owned a fast sports car. David had no favourite girl-friend in Wenton. He

said that what few Wenton girls hadn't escaped from the place were lumps and frumps, and he wouldn't be seen dead with any of them.

Moira uncurled her legs from under her, and stood up. She was wearing scarlet slacks, and an orange jersey, the jersey respectably loose at the top, and as she had an appointment for tea with Mrs. Quantock, the doctor's wife, a change would be necessary. She hoped she would enjoy tea with Janet Quantock, her best friend in Wenton, because the day was Thursday, the week-end approached, and Moira had learned to dread the week-end. One never knew when a fresh outbreak of hostilities would occur between Roger and David.

Looking at herself in the full-length wardrobe mirror after she had changed, she thought that her brown tweed country suit and brown *beret* became her very well. Her dark hair only had one or two flecks of grey in it, and her brown eyes still had few lines around them. Her face was of the round type, with small features, and she had been very attractive in her younger days.

"And I'd be attractive now," she murmured, giving a final touch to the *beret*, "if I wasn't so miserable over Roger and David. No woman can look attractive if she hasn't anything happy in her life. Food, and clothes, and security simply aren't enough, though of course they're important. I'd love to go out and get a job, and let home take care of itself, but there's nothing I can do that anyone would pay me for, except cook. I married Roger before I'd had time to train for anything, and anyway, in those days a girl didn't automatically train for some job, as they all do nowadays."

The Quantocks lived in the main street, in what was known locally as "the doctor's house," because never in living memory had anyone but the village doctor lived in it. A well turned-out maid answered Moira's ring, and admitted her. Moira couldn't help envying Janet her maid, for the art of getting and keeping good maids has been lost nowadays. But a doctor must have a com-

petent door maid, and Janet always seemed to manage to provide one.

The maid showed her into the sitting-room, and Jane got up from her chair with a welcoming smile. Strictly speaking, she was better looking than Moira, for the bones of her face and head were ideal, and obviously she had a firmer character than Moira's. She was fair and grey-eyed, and the firmer character arose from the discipline of her nursing career. Like a good many doctors, Edward Quantock had married a nurse met at his own hospital, so that the busy life of a doctor's wife in the country held no terrors for her, and Edward's surgeries ran like clockwork.

Janet took Moira's hand in a firm clasp and said "Hullo, my dear! Nice to see you. How's everything?"

Privately, she did not think that "everything" seemed too rosy to Moira, who had a slightly hunted look, but that was up to Moira. If she wanted to confess, Jane was prepared to listen, but she did not propose to ask questions. The maid brought in tea, and left, and Janet began to pour out. Moira glanced round the sitting-room. It was not so luxurious as her own, for Edward's income was nothing like Roger's, but it had an endearing charm. She took her cup, sighed faintly, and answered:

"Nice to see you too. 'Everything's' about the same thank you. I wish I was as damned efficient as you, Janet and then 'everything' would be much better than it is." "I was trained in a hard school," Janet explained with mock self-pity, because she had loved every moment of her hospital life, and wouldn't have missed it for worlds. Apart from that, if she had missed it she would have missed Edward, and she and he adored one another.

"Youth may have a lot to do with it, Janet. You're younger than I am, and life hasn't had time to bash you about so much."

"I shall be forty next birthday. There isn't much between us. And if you've been trained in a hard school, when life bashes you you bash back. I wouldn't wonder

if you don't put up with more than you ought to. From the worldly point of view you're better off than I am, because Roger must make a big income. And you're quite efficient enough to get by."

"I shall never find a maid as good as yours, and I shall never run a house like a military operation, as you run yours."

"You could if you liked, but something's eating you, and so you aren't interested."

"And then," Moira continued, "somehow you've managed to found a united family, which is the one thing I can't do."

"Ah, the Oedipus complex," Janet replied, and seemed to think this summed up Moira's family disunion, though Moira was not quite sure what the Oedipus complex meant. "Well, you see, it was different in my case. I had a baby, I very nearly died over it, which was ridiculous for a State-Registered nurse, and my specialist told me I was never to have another, unless I wanted to inhabit a plot in a churchyard. So Derek's very near and dear to both Edward and me, and he likes us both equally well. My maternal vanity kids me that I mean more to Derek than Edward does, but my common sense tells me that, now Derek's eighteen, Edward's far more important in Derek's life than I am. After all, there *are* things nice boys don't discuss with their mothers, and these things loom rather large at eighteen, both with boys and girls. I wouldn't have discussed them with my father, much as I adored him, and still less with my mother. One discussed them with other girls in secret. Probably Derek doesn't discuss them with Edward, but he admires him, because he's a good doctor, and Derek's going to be a doctor too. And that solves this call-up business, because Derek will qualify before call-up, and then he'll go into the R.A.M.C., and his job won't be interfered with."

"As you know, David got a commission, but from the point of view of his job it was a pure waste of time"

"No experience is a waste of time, my dear. Still, I've only one brat, and you have two, one of each sort, and as I nearly died over him, Edward's never forgotten, and he'd never go against my wishes over Derek. I seem to have things made easy for me all round. It's different with you."

"Yes, Janet, it's different with me. But if you'd had two, and I'd had one, you'd still have made the better job of family life. It must, as you say, be your training."

"A woman can always get her own way if she goes the right way about it. She may have to behave like a tart to do it, but to behave like a tart to her husband's considered respectable, isn't it? Just what have you got on your mind at the moment?"

"To-morrow night, darling. David and Penny come home to-morrow night for the week-end. There's nothing to be feared about Penny, because she's the light of Roger's eyes; but anything may happen between him and David."

"I get on very well with David when he comes here to see Derek, and I also get on very well with Roger. As this getting-on-ness with me's common to both of them, they must have something in common with one another."

"Possibly they have, but it's drowned in hate at the moment. They got on all right when David was in the Army; Roger felt very proud of him when he won his commission. But this fetish of Roger's that David must be a solicitor, and step into Roger's shoes later, has come to be a nightmare. Roger and David are hardly on speaking terms sometimes, and David always goes out in the week-end if Roger stays at home, and stays at home if Roger goes out. Roger knows this, and it makes him perfectly livid."

Janet pressed another toasted bun on her sad friend, and delivered judgment.

"If David's made up his mind not to be a solicitor, nothing will make him change it. Even if Roger cuts

him off with a shilling, and drives him out into the snow, it won't make any difference. David can always get a job of some sort that'll keep him from starving. As Roger isn't likely to cut him off, etc., because it would look a bit invidious, he'd better come to terms with David. There's no use forcing a young man to do something he loathes. David will never pass his law exams, and he's just wasting his own life and Roger's money."

"Ah, but you're lucky, Janet." Derek wants to be a doctor, like his father."

"If he wanted to be a dustman, I doubt if Edward would stand in his way. Edward's too good a psychologist. He'd just say:

" 'Very well, Derek,' and let Derek damn' well drown in being a dustman, until he got fed up with it and came to himself. After having a go at being a dustman, he might very well prefer to be a doctor, if he didn't want to be a doctor already.'"

Moirá handed her cup for more tea, because tea always helps a despairing woman, or so it is believed.

"Well," she asked rather desperately, "what shall I do? I can't go on like this." The atmosphere of the house is getting unbearable."

"How does Penny take it?"

"She couldn't care less. Life's terrific fun to her, and she's too busy making the most of it to bother about other people's troubles. You know what girls are like at eighteen, when they're just beginning to feel their power over men. I hate to think how many boy-friends she has in London."

"The more the better. If she had only one, and was crazy about him, you might have cause for worry. I mean, Penny, as one of the young generation, wouldn't put in a word with Daddy, the light of whose eyes she is, for poor David?"

"She's got too much sense. Daddy would only choke her off, and David would probably tell her to mind her own something business."

"Then it all falls on you, Moira. It all always falls on somebody, and you're carrying the can back."

"I suppose you couldn't suggest anything? I'm so close to the situation that I probably get things out of focus."

"All I can see for it is the Delilah act. When Roger's made love to you, unless you've given up all that sort of thing, and realizes he's fond of you, tell him how worried you are, and ask him to be a bit more decent to David. Otherwise there's nothing for it but a Firm Stand; 'I refuse to put up with this sort of thing; it's making home life impossible,' and so on and so on."

"I might try a blend of the two," Moira answered, not very hopefully. "I'm not too good at being a Delilah; I take emotional things too seriously. I'm not very good at Firm Stands either, because the nervous strain of fighting Roger leaves me exhausted. However, I shall have to do something. Let's forget me. How are things with you?"

"Couldn't be better," said Janet, feeling what a pig she was being, and yet, like the late George Washington, unable to tell a lie. "We've got our new car coming next week; it won't be as good as yours, but it's not bad. And Derek's starting at his hospital in a fortnight, and very bucked at the idea. Edward, as usual's in the pink and so am I. I suppose doctors and nurses get bug-proof while training, because we're mixed up with sick people all day long, and learn instinctively not to catch things; for, God knows, there's quite a little epidemic of 'flu in the village just now."

"I suppose the mental attitude's important, Janet. I daresay my mental attitude to my family struggles is all wrong."

"Entirely, my dear. Your attitude should be:

"'I couldn't care less.' As it is, you only wear yourself out, and do no one any good."

Moira crushed out the end of her cigarette, and got up.

"I must go," she said rather regretfully. Janet's robust attitude towards life filled her with envy. "Thank you for

my good tea, and your kind words. I shall either get over my troubles, or become a confirmed melancholic. In the second case, Edward will have to put me in a home, or a hospital, or some place."

She produced a light-hearted smile to negative what she had said, Janet accompanied her to the front door, and, turning back from it, shook her head.

"God help all besotted mothers, and the children they're besotted about," she murmured drily. "I can see two nerve cases coming for Edward; Moira will be one, and David the other."

Moira walked home briskly, went up to her bedroom, and took off her hat and jacket. Then she subsided into an arm-chair, because, since the house was centrally heated, she was as warm in her bedroom as anywhere else, and it had a remoteness which appealed to her at the moment.

"Janet's probably right," she concluded after some reflection. "I worry myself sick, and I get no thanks for it from anyone. David's affectionate towards me in an absent sort of way, but if I went to live in Australia tomorrow I don't suppose he'd mind a great deal. Penny thinks I'm a back number, and I suppose I am from her point of view. The post-war young woman's a different species from any pre-war woman. I try to make Penny behave as I did when I was her age, and I haven't a hope. She knows she's pretty, and damned attractive, and she means to get all she can out of the goods she takes to market. I feel sorry for any young man who's serious about Penny. She'll string him along while there's anything to be got out of him, and when she meets another young man she likes better, she'll drop the first like a hot coal. Or more likely, she has a dozen boy-friends, and when one's broke goes out with one of the others. I couldn't swear that she's what used to be called a 'good' girl, but then I don't know anything about her private life, and never shall. Neither does Roger, although he imagines she tells him everything. One doesn't

worry about a boy's getting into scrapes, of course, but one used to worry about a girl. But in these days they know everything there is to be known, probably more than I do, so there isn't much chance of Penny's coming home and saying:

"'Mummy, I'm going to have a baby, and, honestly, I don't know who the father is.' I suppose that's something to be thankful for."

Then it occurred to her to wonder if Roger were happy.

She harked back mentally to the early days of their marriage. Roger, tall, dark-haired, good-looking, was then a junior partner in his father's firm. They had just moved into the house, and it seemed quite the most marvellous house ever built, because it was *their* house. Moira had been twenty and Roger twenty-six. It was no exaggeration to say that he adored her, and she adored him, except that a woman is never quite so hopelessly in love with a man as a man is with a woman. She always manages, if intelligent, not to lose her head as well as her heart.

After two years, David had been born, and it seemed to Moira that Roger loved her more than ever. He considered, rightly or wrongly that she had been in the jaws of death, all through him, though she had wanted a child most passionately. Therefore, a certain humility mingled with his love, and when he looked at her his eyes were full of admiration.

Two years after David came Penny. By this time, the first madness of marriage had declined. Looking after a baby is an industry in itself, even if one has a nurse, and after David's birth Moira could spare less time for Roger. She had to divide her affections between the two of them, and as David was small and helpless his share was the larger. Occasionally she detected signs of jealousy on Roger, but when she kissed him the jealousy seemed to disappear.

When Penny was born, Roger could not conceal his delight that Moira had borne a girl and not another boy.

It became plain that he would never be jealous of Penny. He seemed to take the view that now they had a child each, Moira David and Roger Penny, and as long as he could have Penny, he would never again be jealous of David.

Dr. Quantock the elder, Edward's father, had explained this to Moira when she brought up the subject one day.

"A man's attitude to his son's dynastic, my dear. The son's the heir apparent, and has to be trained, and groomed, and disciplined to inherit the throne one day. But his attitude to his daughter, especially if she's pretty, as Penny's going to be, is just that of any man towards any pretty girl. Penny'll twist Roger round her little finger later on, but David never will. He'll twist *you* round his little finger, and there lies the seed of disaster for a marriage. I've got a son and a daughter, but then I'm a doctor, and so something of a psychologist. I've always expected Edward to prefer his mother to me, and she doesn't mind Juliet's being fonder of me than she is of her mother. Women prefer male lovers, and the affection of another woman—and after all a daughter's another woman—doesn't mean so much to them. Fortunately, with us, everything's gone smoothly. Edward wanted to be a doctor like me, and I was very pleased, because now he'll take over the practice in time. But if he'd wanted to be something else I shouldn't have stood in his way. If I had, I should only have spoiled my relationship with Edward, his mother would have taken his side, and then I should have spoiled my relationship with her. I suppose Roger will want David to be a lawyer?"

"Oh, yes. He's planning already."

"Well, if, years hence, David doesn't want to be a lawyer, you'll have a situation on your hands. Let's hope he does want to be a lawyer later on."

Moira had forgotten this conversation very quickly, but now, on this autumn afternoon, it came back to her. According to old Dr. Quantock, she ought to let Roger

have his way over David's career, and she couldn't bring herself to, because David's temper was being spoiled and his nature seemed to be changing completely. Besides, obviously he was unhappy. And David was her first-born, and none of the subsequent children ever quite ranks with the first born in the mother's eyes.

By now Roger had changed from the gay laughing lover of twenty-two years before into a grave, sober, middle-aged man. His hair was iron grey, and he had become set in his habits. Moira explained the soberness and grave manner by reminding herself that Roger was a solicitor, and that people would hardly trust a frivolous solicitor. He had never caused her the faintest anxiety from the romantic point of view. She could never have imagined that Roger might have a woman friend in London. He seemed to have settled into a rut, and from that rut he never departed. He came home, talked to her over dinner, asked a few questions about family matters, and then, as often as not, went into his study to work on documents he had brought home with him. He made love to her occasionally, but not very often.

His one amusement was his week-end golf. Moira had grown accustomed to seeing very little of him in the week-end. She did not play golf herself, and even if she had, week-end golf is almost exclusively a male game. Often he invited a friend from London down to play, and brought him home for dinner. These friends chatted politely to Moira over dinner, but she realized that they were men, and belonged to another world from hers. In her own mind she always called them "the backbone of the country," solid, solvent, professional men, with wives and families exactly like Roger's wife and family. It was all desperately dull, and most respectable.

About once a month, Roger would invite her up to London for dinner and a theatre. The restaurant to which he took her was as solid and solvent and respectable as himself. Moira would have loved to see bright young people, the girls in daring dresses, the young

men flippant and irresponsible, but quite naturally these went elsewhere. Roger always asked her to choose the theatre to which she would like to be taken, but if the play bored him he took little trouble to conceal the fact. These monthly theatre parties, and the cinema at Dalesbridge, constituted her only link with contemporary mental life. There was the local lending library, but Moira had begun to weary of books. She longed to meet people with sparkling conversation, who laughed, and enjoyed life, but one couldn't do this in Wenton. There they knew all the upper middle-class residents, who could hardly be said to sparkle. They had a sober way of life similar to Roger's, and were concerned chiefly with ways and means, with putting by money for their later lives, with their children at school, and so on.

Sometimes Moira asked herself rather desperately why, because one was married to a solid, successful man, and had children, one couldn't contrive an amusing life of one's own. But, apart from Janet Quantock and her husband, Moira had no real friends. Her relations were scattered, and her parents were dead. Besides, nothing could bridge the gap in time which separated her from the days when her sisters and cousins were young together. They all lived in the country, they were all married with children, and no doubt they were just as dull as the solid upper middle-class people in Wenton.

And now, there was the *contretemps* of David and his father. For months Roger had gone about with an air of one who nurses a grievance, on account of David. David was becoming rapidly a problem child, supposing he had still been a child. Penny flitted in and out of her home throwing a smile here and a smile there, but never staying long. In the week she was in London, and in the week-end she was always out with one young man or another. One, as it were, passed her on the stairs, and that was all.

Moira got up from her chair, looked at her wrist watch, and saw it was time to change for dinner. Roger

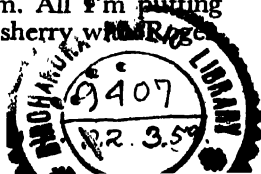
would be home in half an hour—one could not imagine his catching an earlier or later train than usual—and she must be charmingly turned out to welcome him with a smile, and cheerful talk, over the pre-dinner sherry. He would tell her nothing of what happened during the day, and all his conversation would be confined to Wenton, his home, and the children. And Moira longed almost pathetically for a little gossip from London. She had come to the conclusion that solicitors never gossiped, or heard any gossip.

She took off the skirt of her faded suit, and her blouse, and stood for a moment in front of a long mirror considering her figure.

"I'm still slim, and having two babies hasn't made me go stiff, or bulgy," she murmured. "My face would be attractive too if I didn't look so depressed when I'm not smiling. But then, life's depressing. There's the David trouble, and I've reached the age when nothing much lies ahead, except to drift down into middle-age, and then old age. There'll never be any more excitement, with one's heart beating faster because one hears a certain man's footsteps. Nobody will ever again bring me flowers when there's no reason, no birthday or anything, for bringing them, except that he wants to bring them. And those are the nicest flowers of all."

From her wardrobe she chose a crimson silk dress, because the colour was cheerful on an autumn night, and crimson suited her dark hair and eyes. It was a very good dress, and when she had put it on she felt extremely well groomed. She wished half sadly that she had put it on for an occasion, to be taken out to an amusing party, if there had been any amusing party in the neighbourhood, but there never was. In a fit of impatience she told herself:

"The English upper middle-classes must be the dullest people in the world. They never adopt a new idea because new ideas shock and scare them. All I'm putting on this charming dress for is to drink sherry with Roger."



who wouldn't care if I'd kept on my suit. One night, I think I'll go down to dinner in slacks, just to shake him. It would be interesting to hear what he said."

Having given the last touches to her make-up, she went down to the big sitting-room, automatically assuming her welcoming face on the way. She had scarcely reached the sitting-room when the sound of the front door's opening announced the arrival of Roger. She knew exactly what he would do; he would go up to the bathroom to wash his hands, to his dressing-room to brush his hair, and then come down with that measured tread which he had acquired as the years went on. Five minutes later, he opened the sitting-room door, gave Moira a brief smile, said:

"Good evening, dear. Had a nice day?" and turned to pour out sherry for Moira and himself. He then sat in an arm-chair, sipped his sherry, and seemed lost in thought. Moira, from long experience, knew that he had something on his mind. No doubt what it was would be revealed during dinner.

"I've had tea with Janet Quantock, if that means having a nice day," she answered rather coldly. It was not as if he cared whether she had had a nice day or not. His thoughts, obviously were elsewhere.

"Janet is a good friend for you," Roger asserted after some moments. "And, of course, Edward's a gentleman. And they're younger than you are, which makes them stimulating I suppose."

"I think," Moira told him, "that apart from Janet and Edward, the inhabitants of Winton are the duller people in the world. I like the farmers, because they're doing a creative job, but all these stockbrokers, and business men, and their wives give me a pain in the neck. They have simply no ideas, and nothing intelligent to talk about. The women can only discuss their kitchens and their brats, and grumble about their husbands, because the husbands keep a sharp eye on money, and the women would all like mink coats."

Chapter Two

THE door opened to reveal the housekeeper, who announced dinner. She held the door, and Roger stood back for Moira to go out first. In the dining-room, which was a quiet, intimate room, they sat in their accustomed places, and Moira ran over the menu in her mind. It would be tomato soup, loin of lamb and two vegetables, an apple pie which the housekeeper made superbly, cheese and biscuits. This was the kind of meal Roger loved. He would have hated smoked salmon, risotto of chicken and a *soufflé*. Perhaps, Moira thought, the wear and tear of being an important solicitor, concerned with the seamier side of people's lives, divorce, and death, caused him to need solid meals.

The housekeeper served the soup, poured a white wine into Moira's glass, and left. Roger helped himself to whisky from a decanter which stood by him. Moira knew from long experience that he would have two whiskies and sodas at dinner, and one as a nightcap before he went to bed; no more, and no fewer. She suddenly wished wildly that he would get drunk, just for a change, but that was hopeless. Roger would never get drunk.

She sat silent while they drank their soup, and Roger finished half his first whisky and soda. Married life had taught her that a man who has travelled one hour each way in a train to and from London, and done a day's work, needs a little peace, some food, and a drink when he gets home to restore his energy. After that he may perhaps enjoy conversation.

The soup finished, she pressed a bell-push in the floor with one foot. The housekeeper returned, removed the

soup plates, and served the lamb and vegetables. Having tasted his first mouthful, Roger looked up and said:

"I've had a most annoying telephone call from Fastnet. It was about David."

Moira knew all about Mr. Fastnet. He was the senior partner in a firm of solicitors, Messrs. Fastnet & Quick, and to them David was articled. She smiled enchantingly at Roger and said:

"Why was the telephone call so annoying, Roger? You and Mr. Fastnet are very good friends."

"I said it was about David," Roger replied, his tone implying that no one but a lunatic would suppose that a telephone call about David could be anything but annoying. "Fastnet seemed to be pretty fed up, and really I can't wonder."

"What's he fed up about?"

"David won't work. He takes no interest in the law. They can't trust him to do the most simple thing correctly; not that, at his stage he'd be trusted with anything important. But he hasn't the will to learn. Fastnet said that, much as he hated telling me, he can't go on like this. After all, they're a firm of very good repute, and they don't want to be bothered with an idler. David's simply doing some other young man out of the chance to be a solicitor, and that's most unfair. The other young man would be keen, and work, and David's ruining the other young man's chance. I call it disgraceful."

As one could hardly be a Delilah at the dinner table, with the housekeeper coming in and going out, Moira decided to take the firm stand recommended, as an alternative to the Delilah act, by Janet.

"You can hardly be surprised," she told Roger. "David never wanted to have anything to do with the law. He hates it. It was you who forced him into it. You can hardly complain that he doesn't produce any results."

"You seem to be quite out of touch with reality," Roger replied with exaggerated patience. His atmosphere suggested:

"God knows there never was such an exasperating, self-opinionated woman, but nothing will induce me to lose my temper." He went on:

"Naturally, I want to see David well established in life, and I suppose you do too; or do you want to have him starving in the gutter? If David does well, he can become a partner in our firm, and succeed to my position, and earn from £3,000 to £4,000 a year. That's pretty good in these hard times. But he chooses to throw away prospects which any sensible young man would jump at, and as far as I can see, you're on his side. Pray what's he going to do if he doesn't qualify and succeed to the practice? Where else can he make such a good living? I may be dull, but I see no aptitude in David for any particular profession. In that case, he'd better concentrate on the law, which, for a man of average intelligence, is just a matter of hard work and diligence. I admit that some solicitors are better than others, but David has the law in his blood. His grandfather was a lawyer, and so am I, and these things count. David was practically born a lawyer, but he's too stupid to realize it."

The housekeeper came in, removed the meat plates, and served the apple pie. Her entrance gave Moira a chance to digest what Roger had said, and plan a counter attack.

When the housekeeper had gone out once more, she said:

"You can't expect a boy of David's age to know what he wants to do in life."

"David isn't a boy," Roger replied with a solicitor's dreadful precision. "Legally one's a young person up to the age of eighteen, after which one becomes a man, or a woman. True, one sees advertisements in the *Times*, inserted by silly women which read:

"'Girl, aged thirty-five, needs job,' and the papers refer to the W.R.N.S. 'girls', and the W.R.A.C. 'girls', but that's merely the baby talk of the times we live in. David's a man, with a man's responsibilities, one of which is to fit himself for earning his living. I suppose

he'll want to marry some day, and he can't keep a wife on nothing."

"She'll probably have a job herself, and be independent."

"A nice prospect for David! Still, that's beside the point. So far your criticism's been entirely negative, your criticism of me, I mean. Haven't you anything constructive to suggest?"

"I suggest that you stop being the heavy father, and discuss with David what he *does* want to do."

"At his age he doesn't know what he wants, so he might just as well take the chance of a safe and profitable living. Most young men would jump at it."

"He should know what he wants. He's done two years in the Army, most of them commissioned, and met all sorts of men, and served in Germany."

"My dear Moira, the Army's mentality's proverbial. At Sandhurst they turn out first class private soldiers, and the cadets aren't allowed to think for themselves. Then the young officer's seconded to a Regiment, and there he has to think on exactly the same lines as the C.O., and his mind gets into a still narrower rut. It would be just as well for David to forget all he learned in the Army."

"The Army set him up physically, anyway."

Roger then assumed a blandness which he was far from feeling; the blandness assumed by learned counsel when he wishes to trap a witness into some statement incriminating the accused.

"Well, dear," he said, "David's your spoiled darling, so perhaps you've some clue to the workings of his mind on the subject of a career?"

"I think, but I'm not sure, that he wants to go in for television *via* journalism. Anyway, he told me so once, but that was some time ago."

"What utter nonsense! He's never shown any signs of being able to write, and to succeed in this loathsome television business seems to need the technique of a confidence man. One has to lead the sort of people who look

at television up the garden path all the time. Difficult as he is, I see no signs in David of the confidence man. At least he's straightforward. And what future is there in television for a man, except for the one in a million who happens to catch on with the television public?"

"Penny's your spoilt darling, and you don't mind a bit about her modelling. Not one girl in a thousand becomes an outstanding model. You could count the outstanding ones on the fingers of both hands."

"Oh," said Roger, with a slightly pitying smile, "Penny'll marry. You've only to look at her to see that."

"And then? If he's young he won't have any money, and if he has any money he'll be old, and she won't want to marry him."

"Like the wife you prophesied for David, she'll have her job, and could be independent."

"You can't go on modelling at forty, or very seldom."

The housekeeper removed the sweet plates, and served cheese and biscuits. Coffee would be served in the sitting-room. Roger helped himself liberally to cheese, but Moira merely nibbled a biscuit. She was thinking of the show-down about David which would probably eventuate in the sitting-room over coffee, when the housekeeper had finished her service for the evening. Roger, being now full, and consequently becoming more and more bland, smiled at her.

"Don't, please," he besought her, "stage a picture of the devoted mother fighting for her young. David's my young as well as yours, remember. I'm trying to do my best for him, but he won't co-operate. I have a lot of influence where the law's concerned, but none at all where journalism and television are concerned. Consequently, I adopt the logical course, and place him in the law. I shall have a good deal to say to him on this subject in the week-end."

Moira did not reply. Roger finished his biscuits and cheese, laid aside his napkin, and said:

"Shall we go and have our coffee, if you're ready?"

Moira preceded him into the sitting-room, and curled up in an arm-chair. The housekeeper served coffee, said good night, and left them alone. Having poured the coffee, and seen Roger take his cup, Moira said:

"My dear Roger, I really can't stand any more of these frightful week-ends with David going about like a bear with a sore head, and you giving an imitation of the Roman father. The only normal person left in the house is Penny, and she just has breakfast, and smiles, and disappears with some young man for the rest of the day, and mayn't even turn up for dinner. I'm certainly not normal, because you and your quarrel with David are giving me melancholia. I suppose I'm entitled to be amused a little in the week-end, but for me it's a damned sight worse than the week, when I'm alone all day. And as you propose to say a good deal to David this week-end about this law business, I imagine this week-end will be rather more foul than usual."

Roger, taking refuge in a *cliché* his grandfather no doubt used to his grandmother, replied:

"Women don't understand these things, dear. Only a man understands another man. However, if you've anything to suggest . . . ?"

"Tell him to get to hell out of Fastnet & Quick's, and go and get a job on his own. If anything will make him cling to Fastnet & Quick, that would, except that he isn't a sissy, and wouldn't play for safety. There's no desperate hurry for him to qualify as a solicitor. Let him find out, if he does find out, that you're his best bet; and that his own ideas of getting a living don't work. I don't think he'd ever come back to you and say:

"'Daddy, you were right, and I was wrong. Please may I be articled to some solicitors again?' but he might. In that case I should be very disappointed in him, because he'd have fluffed two chances, the one you've given him and the one he'd have taken, but one has to give the young some rope. They only recognize what they want themselves nowadays."

"I'm sorry you find life so dull, Moira," Roger said gravely. "But then, you don't play golf, and there's nothing much else to do in Wenton."

"You don't suppose I want to crawl round the course in the week with a lot of tabbies, and not a man under the age of a hundred in sight, do you? And women just stink on a golf course in the week-end. That's when the exhausted fathers of families refresh themselves."

"The other wives and mothers in Wenton seem to be happy enough with their husbands, and children, and home."

"They're the tabbies I was referring to. Their chief hobby is washing other people's dirty linen in public."

Roger affected to sigh, but he was not sad. Evidently, Moira was in a mood, but then women did get in moods. There was no sense in taking their moods seriously. He flicked the ash from his cigar, and stood up.

"This conversation doesn't seem to be leading anywhere," he told Moira, "and I've some work I brought home that I must do. I'll be in the study if you want me. I shall probably get to bed fairly late."

Moira nodded, and Roger went out, shutting the door carefully and silently behind him. It seemed good to reach his study, switch on the light, sit down at his writing table, and begin work. He found work the great anodyne for life in a world which had changed out of all recognition from the world he was born in. Moira's reproaches and ideas had not influenced him in the least. He was still determined that David should become a solicitor, and inherit the practice. He would make that clear to David on Saturday.

When Roger had gone two tears came into Moira's eyes. They were not so much tears of sorrow as tears of frustration. She blinked them away, and reflected:

"I seem to have heard that, sooner or later in a herd of deer a young stag fights the old leader of the herd for leadership. I shouldn't think it was very much fun for the girls of the herd. Anyway, that's approximately

what goes on in this house every Saturday, Roger representing the old leader of the herd, and David the young stag. In the deer world the young stag always wins in the end, though not always at the first go, and the old leader goes out into the night, and the new leader has fun and games with the girl deer. I don't know if David will ever win his fight with Roger, but I wish one or the other would win quickly, because my nerves won't stand much more of the preliminary fighting. At the moment, it looks as though David will go out into the night. He can't push Roger out of his own home. All I can do is to thank heaven for Penny, who's completely entranced with life, except that I hardly ever see her. It makes a nice change to have someone around who's entranced with life."

Out of sheer habit, she switched on the radio, and then, as some expert was giving a talk on the habits of fish, switched it off again. There seemed nothing for it but to go to bed.

Having reached her bedroom, she stood for a moment admiring its charm. The carpet was dark blue, the walls and ceiling palest yellow, and the curtains gold damask. The bedspreads matched the curtains. It seemed a room made for love, but the days of wild love-making, Maura realized with a sigh, had gone for ever. She undressed, put a book and her sleeping tablets on her bedside table, and lay down, cuddling the bedclothes around her chin. She promised herself that to-night she would read herself to sleep, and not take a sleeping tablet, and knew the promise to be vain. For some years now she had been unable to sleep without a sleeping tablet.

Then, having got warm, she sat up, propped the pillows behind her shoulders, swallowed the tablet with a drink of water, and began to read. It would take half an hour for the tablet to have effect. In a little while she put the book down, and let her thoughts drift to Roger.

She could picture him in his study working with methodical concentration. Later he would come into the bedroom, wearing his dark blue silk dressing gown, and,

if she were awake, kiss her good night. He would then go to his own twin bed, and fall asleep within five minutes. The one thing she envied him was this capacity to fall asleep almost instantly. He would make no reference to their conversation about David, because he had a theory that one should never discuss controversial matters just before going to sleep. She would listen to his deep, regular breathing, and then drift into the dull, unrestful slumber induced by a hypnotic. If she were lucky, she would remain asleep for an hour and a half, and then wake in the middle of some disturbing dream. Unless she took a second tablet, it was a matter of chance whether she would sleep any more that night.

She asked herself rather wearily:

"Is the Roger-David situation all my fault, because I must be nervy since I don't sleep? If I made the home perfectly happy, wouldn't Roger and David be the best of friends, and work out some compromise? But then, as far as I can see, Roger's perfectly happy. His job's his life, and he's doing better at it than ever. The winding up of the Stokes-Lewisham estate alone ought to bring him a small fortune, because it'll take about a couple of years. As for David, he's in the fretful adolescent stage, and he hasn't settled down since he left the Army. Young men are far more difficult than young women. Probably he'll settle sooner or later. So perhaps it isn't all my fault, and I needn't make myself miserable about it."

She switched off her bedside light, shut her eyes, and prepared to sleep, but in spite of the tablet, sleep would not come. An hour later, at midnight, Roger entered the room very quietly, and stood for a moment looking down at her by the light of the ceiling lamp. She pretended to be asleep, so that Roger moved softly across to his bed, switched on his bedside light, switched off the ceiling lamp, and, as usual, folded his dressing gown carefully after taking it off, and laid it on the foot of the bed ready for the morning. Then he too got into bed, and the room was in darkness.

Finally, Moira cheated, stretched out a hand for the bottle of sleeping tablets, and took a second. The safe dose was three, but she never took more than one if she could help it. Three left one with a hangover in the morning. This time she slept, and did not awake till six a.m.

She sat up, switched on her light, pushed back her dark hair, and glanced across at Roger. With one shoulderstrap of her nightgown slipping off her shoulder, she looked not much more than a girl, with her flawless skin and slight figure. Roger lay with his face towards her, still fast asleep. He would not wake till seven. He never did. She thought how young he looked in his sleep, and how sleep had ironed out the lines at the corners of his eyes, and the nose-to-mouth lines. He seemed for the moment her young, ardent lover of twenty-two years before, and she had a wild impulse to go over to his bed, lie down beside him, and indicate that she could be made love to. Then the mood was suppressed ruthlessly. In the first place one should never make love hurriedly in the morning, and in the second, probably Roger hadn't the slightest desire to make love to her. There would be no question of staging the Delilah act advocated by Janet. As there was no chance of her sleeping any more, she got up silently, and went into the bathroom to run her bath. When the housekeeper brought early tea at seven o'clock, Moira was sitting up in bed bathed, made-up, her hair shining from being brushed. The housekeeper, an unemotional woman, could not help thinking how pretty Madam looked.

Roger woke automatically, sat up after the housekeeper had gone, wished Moira good morning, and began to pour out his tea. Having poured it, he went on to Moira:

"You look perfectly delicious, dear. How do you manage it so early in the day?"

Moira could not have said conscientiously that Roger looked delicious. Twenty-four hours' dark beard do not improve a man's appearance. She answered calmly:

"It's all artificial. I just went mad, and had my bath early, and did my face and my hair. It was like a bird's nest when I woke at six. I knew I shouldn't sleep any more, and it's a bore lying awake doing nothing."

"I wish you could sleep better," Roger said kindly. "Why not see Quantock again, and ask if he can't do something about it?"

"I don't think doctors know anything about sleep, Roger. One either sleeps or one doesn't. If one doesn't, the only thing is to take something. He gave me phenobarbitone, but it makes one feel so dull. I just buy this dope you can get from any chemist without a prescription."

"Perhaps if you took more exercise?" Roger asked. He had a fetish about exercise.

"I dare say if I chopped down trees all day I should get so tired I couldn't help sleeping. But then, I can't chop down trees, and, anyway, if I could, where are the trees to chop?"

Roger nodded, drank the last of his tea, got out of bed, put on his dressing gown, and departed to bath and dress. He did not need to look forward to a wet bath, because there were two bathrooms. When he had gone, Moira put on a tweed skirt and a sweater, gave the last touches to her hair and make-up, and went downstairs to the dining-room. The breakfast table looked spotless and inviting, and once more Moira thanked heaven for a perfect housekeeper. As long as you left Mrs. Haines alone, she functioned perfectly. Since she knew her job, she loathed being interfered with. Moira, and she had long since come to a ladies' agreement on this subject. Moira knew there would be bacon and eggs, which Roger adored. He adored kidneys and bacon still more. She made a note to try and get kidneys that morning, so that on the next day they might put Roger in a good temper with David. David would eat anything, so long as there was a lot of it; Penny stuck to her half grapefruit, toast, and marmalade, having the modern girl's terror of putting on weight.

Roger came down impeccable in his black jacket and carefully pressed striped trousers, fresh from his bath and his razor, his hair sleeked with honey and flowers, a spotless handkerchief showing in the outside pocket of his jacket. Moira could not help admitting that he presented a very admirable figure of the senior professional man. He smiled at her, and they sat down. Not the faintest reference was made to the controversy of the evening before. Roger discussed with her plans for the garden in the following year, and said how well the dahlias and chrysanthemums were doing, as well as her plants in the conservatory, which was heated, so that she could produce something a little more exotic than dahlias and chrysanthemums. If it had not been for the prospect of the week-end, Moira would have felt perfectly happy, and congratulated herself on having a charming husband, who behaved beautifully to her, even if his passion for her had waned.

Roger, who brought method into everything he did, ate his breakfast at moderate speed; he always left himself plenty of time to do so before he caught his train for London. Having finished, he stood up, paused for a moment in thought, apparently decided not to say whatever he had been going to say, walked round the table to Moira, and kissed her good-bye. There was this, she thought, to be said for Roger: he never forgot to kiss her when leaving home and arriving back, nor to give her flowers on her birthday, Christmas Day, and the anniversary of their marriage. More than that, he often brought her flowers from London for no reason at all when they were scarce in the country. She did not follow him into the hall to watch him put on overcoat and hat, and wave good-bye to him from the doorstep. She knew he would not have liked these attentions, and she could sympathize. It would have been an awful bore if Roger had sat in the bedroom staring at her while she dressed to go out.

Her breakfast over, she sat reading one of the papers.

There was no need to ring, because of an understanding that Mrs. Haines would clear the breakfast-table when it suited her. When finally she came in, Moira said:

"I rather want to have kidneys and bacon for breakfast to-morrow, Mrs. Haines. Mr. Heysham loves them, and David will eat them at least. They'll put Mr. Heysham in a good mood, and I want him in a good mood to-morrow. I'll go out this morning, and try to wring four kidneys from the butcher."

"Very good, Madam; and what would you like for yourself? I know you hate kidneys. I suppose Miss Penny will eat nothing, as usual?"

"Yes, just her grapefruit and toast. A boiled egg will do for me. Is there anything else, you want in the village?"

"We could do with some more coffee, Madam, and if I ring the grocer and ask him to send it he'll only say he can't."

"All right, I'll bring the coffee too."

Moira folded her paper, for Roger loathed and despised a woman who left a paper in a disordered state, and went upstairs to get her handbag. She was looking, she thought, rather nice in a twin-set that toned with a tweed skirt. She wouldn't wear a hat, and her raincoat hung in the hall cupboard. A pale autumn sun shone through the bedroom windows. Moira stood for a moment or two gazing on the melancholy spectacle of an autumn garden, and then turned to go downstairs.

When she reached the main street, she found that, as usual, it featured at eleven a.m. a procession of local matrons doing their family shopping. Janet wouldn't be there, because Edward's surgery was only just over, and he would be sure to have instructions to leave with her. Since Edward had no partner, Janet found herself almost as busy with his affairs as he. Besides, she had learned shorthand and typing in order to save the cost of a secretary. Moira sometimes thought enviously that Janet could go at any time and earn her living, either as a

nurse, or a secretary, or as the two combined for some Harley Street consultant.

Moir's progress was interrupted here and there by the greeting of a woman acquaintance, and the gentle, aimless clack which women exchange on these occasions. There is always some household joy or sorrow to be recounted. The butcher proved unusually amiable; certainly Mrs. Heysham could have four kidneys, or six if she would like six. Moira explained that she was no kidney fan, and that they were for husband's and son's breakfast. The butcher nodded, wrapped the obscene looking entrails, and handed them to her. She proceeded to the grocer's for coffee, and there encountered Mrs. Stole, the Vicar's wife.

Mrs. Stole was older than Moira, and looked older than her age, because, since the Vicar was High Church, and verging on being an Anglo Catholic, he did not permit the limitation of his family, and so Mrs. Stole had produced six children. She felt thankful that she could produce no more, on account of her age. She wished Moira good morning, said it was a nice day for the time of the year, and went on:

"I suppose David and Penny will be home to-night for the week-end?"

"Yes, Mrs. Stole. I've just been shopping kidneys for Roger's and David's breakfast to-morrow. Penny doesn't eat breakfast; she's afraid for her figure."

Mrs. Stole sighed, partly because she had long ceased to have a figure, partly because with six children, two training for jobs, two at boarding school, and two at home, she couldn't run to kidneys, which cost money. The Vicar's very small private income, and his stipend would not stretch that far, particularly as they had an enormous vicarage to maintain.

"I suppose David and Penny will soon be off your hands financially?" she asked wistfully.

"I expect so. David's articed to some solicitors, and

Penny's nearly finished her training to be a model. She ought to get a job in the next couple of months."

"I'm rather sorry Penny's going to be a model, dear. She's such a nice girl, and showing off her figure to a mixed audience doesn't seem *quite* suitable for a nice girl."

"She wants to be a model, and there's no use going against young people's wishes."

"I suppose we shan't see either David or Penny in church on Sunday? I don't think they've been there since last Easter."

"Probably not," Moira agreed. "Church going doesn't seem to mean anything to modern young people. And then, when they were at boarding school, they had to attend chapel twice every Sunday, and have prayers every weekday, and they tell me they're fed up with church, and need a rest. I don't know that one can blame them. They'll probably alter their minds later on."

"Do you think you could persuade them to come next Sunday just for once? We get such tiny congregations nowadays, and it's so disheartening for the Vicar."

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not try. In the first place, it wouldn't be any good, and in the second I think young people ought to decide these matters for themselves."

Mrs. Stole sighed again. It seemed to her that her life was just one long sigh. Then she conjured up a smile and said:

"Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Heysham. I'm sure you'd get them to church if you could. Good-bye."

Moira walked homeward with her kidneys and her coffee brooding on Mrs. Stole and the Vicar. It seemed hard to have to offer something that hardly anyone wanted nowadays. The Vicar's congregation consisted mostly of elderly spinsters. Then she forgot Mrs. Stole in her own preoccupations. She felt that this evening was going to see a show-down between Roger and David, and if all didn't go well, even kidneys for breakfast

wouldn't heal the wounds. Arriving home, she went into the kitchen, and handed over the kidneys and coffee to Mrs. Haines.

"You certainly have a way with the butcher, Madam," said that excellent woman. "I doubt if I could have got four kidneys out of him. Thank you very much. You've saved me a lot of time and trouble."

"Not a bit," Moira answered, left the kitchen, and went out into the garden. Autumn had lent it a charming sadness, and nothing could alter that until spring came, bringing the snowdrops and the crocuses. She wandered round, approving the jobbing gardener's tidy borders and flower beds. Then she began to pick chrysanthemums for the house and for Penny's bedroom. It seemed only appropriate for that elegant young woman to find flowers in her bedroom. Moira knew that, for all her assumed worldliness and sophistication, Penny was still something of a child, ready to feel delight because Mummy had thought to arrange flowers in her bedroom.

Having picked her flowers, Moira wandered round to the front of the house, and leaned over the gate. Through that gate, in the old days, snorting horses had drawn carriages bearing guests to dine at what was now her house. A car appeared in the distance, an open sports car, driven by a young man. On seeing Moira, he asked, and stopped in front of the gate.

"Good morning, Mrs. Heysham," he said with a wide smile which would have won him his way to almost any woman's heart. "I suppose Penny'll be down this evening, won't she? There's a rather good picture showing in Dalesbridge she might like to see."

"Good morning, Spike," Moira answered, with a smile as engaging as his own. This was Spike Harwich, whose father owned a large garage in the village, with agencies for all the makes of car he was likely to sell to the locals. Moira liked Spike, a large young man six feet tall, a qualified automobile engineer, who worked all the

hours there were in the week, and liked to enjoy himself in the week-end. He was one of Penny's innumerable boy-friends. Moira felt that Penny could consider herself lucky to have him.

"Yes," she went on. "Penny'll be home to-night. I'm sure she'd like to see the picture if she hasn't seen it in London."

"She can't have seen all the pictures in London," Spike, who was an optimist by nature, suggested. "Thanks a lot, Mrs. Heysham. I'll ring Penny this evening, if I may. Good-bye."

He let in the clutch, waved a rather grubby hand, and disappeared to the music of a typical sports car roar. Moira realized that it wasn't his car, which was a sports saloon, but one he was testing. With a little pang in her heart, she wished suddenly that some attractive man was eager to make a date with her, but of course that would never happen again. If she went out, she would go with Roger to meet some other man and his wife, and the men would talk about masculine interests, and the women would discuss domestic matters, and it would all be frightfully dull.

"Am I hankering for illegitimate kisses at my age?" she asked herself ironically, and went into the house.

In Penny's room she arranged her chrysanthemums, gave the room a housewife's penetrating glance, and saw that all was in order. When Penny arrived, it would soon be all in disorder. She continued to David's room, where flowers would hardly be welcome. There, too, she could find no fault. Mrs. Haines had been her usual competent self. Feeling like an eavesdropper, Moira glanced inside David's built-in wardrobe. There she saw suits and an overcoat ranged in military precision. On the floor of the wardrobe several pairs of shoes were dressed by the right.

Moira shut the wardrobe door, and smiled. David had evidently learned things in the Service. Somehow the sight of this orderly scene comforted her. So methodical a young man should surely do well in life?

Chapter Three

PENNY and David reached Baker Street station in good time for the 6.15 p.m. train to Werron. This was part of a conspiracy to avoid Roger, who travelled by the same train. If he saw them, he would either travel with them third class, which was all their finances would run to, or invite them into a first class carriage, and pay the difference between third and first class fares. They did not wish to incommode him, and also it was necessary to plot their strategy for the week-end. The young are always at war with their elders in a polite way, and Penny and David preferred to avoid any occasion of offence. In their experience, elders took offence so easily at what seemed perfectly logical and natural to their generation.

Being early, they found a corner seat for Penny, and David sat next to her. Penny presented a distracting appearance in a green dress, which contrasted admirably with her red-brown hair, a black coat with loose shoulders, a defined waist, and flaring skirts, and a little black hat. David, free at last from Service dress regulations, wore shapeless grey flannel slacks, a tweed jacket, and a rather soiled raincoat. He was hatless, and his dark hair might with advantage have been cut shorter.

Penny cadged a cigarette from him, lit it, and asked: "What are your week-end prospects, David? Naturally, I shall be dated up all the time as soon as I get home."

"Pretty bloody, I should say."

"Why?"

"Because our Mum Fastnet rang Daddy at his office and"

gave him a rocket about me. I know, because our Mr. Fastnet told me so. He said I was pretty well hopeless as far as he could see, not because I'm not intelligent, but because I don't work. Well, I've no intention of working. I hate the law, and I'd loathe to be a lawyer. The only thing is to get stinking reports from Fastnet, and tie Daddy out, so that he'll see his dream of my inheriting the family practice is sheer nuts. Then we may be able to talk sense."

"You'd make a packet if you were senior partner, David, and what does it matter what you do as long as you're well-fixed?"

"Just the difference between being happy and being browned off. Besides, it wouldn't be such a packet. Daddy will take something out of the firm after he retires. He's got to keep himself, and Mummy, and he can't have saved enough to live on, with Income Tax what it is. When they're both dead, I suppose I might have a packet, but then I shall be so old it wouldn't be much good."

"Too bad. I'm considered quite wonderful, although I'm doing exactly what I want to do. Isn't it clever of me?"

"You're Daddy's pin-up girl, which makes all the difference. Sex comes into everything, even into the relationship between father and daughter. It's sad, but it's true."

"Where," Penny asked reasonably, "should we be without sex? For one thing we shouldn't have been born, and I find life quite fun. For another, it makes life amusing. Besides, you're Mummy's pin-up boy, so we break even."

"We don't, because Daddy holds the cheque book, and is the boss in the home. If things were the other way round, I should be doing what I want to do, and you'd probably be a governess."

"Then I should let the child's father make love to me, and he'd give me a mink coat out of sheer gratitude."

Why don't you make love to Mr. Fastnet's daughter, and then she'd intercede for you with her cruel father?"

"I don't know Fastnet's daughter, and I've a girlfriend of my own. Women sell themselves for worldly advantage, my dear, but men don't."

"Plenty of little boys sell themselves to naughty old ladies who're in the money. However, I see what you mean."

At this moment, Penny's eyes caught a man in the further corner of the carriage, whose glance wandered over her nylon-clad legs, legs which few men could behold unmoved, and the top of her green dress, which could be seen as she had unbuttoned her coat. She gave him an icy look, and he turned his head away. Feeling much comforted by his mute tribute, Penny went on:

"Has Daddy said anything to you about Fastnet's rocket?"

"No. Fastnet only telephoned yesterday. I expect Daddy's saving it up for the week-end, which will be fun, I don't think. I wouldn't have come down, except that I promised Mummy."

"Well," Penny told him light-heartedly, "it's all yours. I shall probably be out with Spike the whole time. I like Spike. He knows just what he wants, and how to get it, but there's no ill-feeling. Nobody could be cross with Spike. He'd only laugh if one were. So you and Daddy can fight the Battle of Waterloo to your hearts' content. It won't be much fun for Mummy, because her heart will be riven in twain at the thought of your being ticked off by Daddy, but that's what comes of being a mother."

"Callous little bitch, aren't you?"

"I shall probably be a mother myself one day, so I've got it coming to me," Penny answered a trifle grimly. "A girl's love-life's very short, and she needs to make the most of it. Even when you're fifty, some little girl will be what's called kind to you, as long as you've the price of some dinners, and theatres, and dances, but who'll look at me when I'm fifty? And how can I find Mr.

Right, as he used to be called, unless I play around with all the Mr. Wrongs?"

"I haven't a clue."

David stared out of the window, while the train rattled along past all the familiar stations: Pinner, Northwood, Rickmansworth, Chorley Wood, Chalfont Road, Amersham. . . . At Winton he would meet Roger on the platform, and it would be hard to carry things off lightly, and pretend that nothing was wrong. Penny sat and dreamed. If Spike didn't ring her, somebody else would, and the house wouldn't see her all day, and for much of the night.

"I really can't stick around while Daddy breathes fire and brimstone, and David sulks," she told herself. "Nothing would put more lines on the face. The Daddy-David set-up's put a good many lines on Mummy's face already. It doesn't matter much about hers, but it does matter about mine. I haven't yet Got My Man."

On the platform at Winton they stood looking for Roger. They saw him a little way off talking to a man he knew, with whom he had travelled down. Then he nodded to the man, came over to them, and said:

"Hullo, Penny! Hullo, David! Had a good week?"

Penny answered:

"Marvellous, thank you, Daddy," and why not? She had been taken to the cinema and supper by two young men, and dancing with a third. David said, with the faintest trace of irony:

"Middling, thank you," and looked his father in the eyes. Having served two years in the Army, he wasn't afraid of his father, or even of his C.O., who could have made things much more uncomfortable for him than Daddy.

Roger, noting the look in the eyes, hardened his heart. So David was going to be difficult. But he gave no sign of a hardened heart, and merely replied:

"Well, let's get on, or we shall keep dinner waiting."

Penny walked next to him, which consoled him. She

felt that the further she kept him away from David the better. To Roger, who loved her very much, this semi-contact seemed like heaven. But he was determined to play fair, and discussed across her the football prospects for the coming season with David. When he opened the front door with his latchkey, he and David stood back for Penny to enter, and then David stood back for Roger. David and he took off their coats, and Roger his hat, and then, led by Penny, they proceeded to the sitting-room, where Moira awaited them.

If she was full of apprehension, she gave no sign. She smiled, kissed Penny, asked her and David how they were, and indicated the sherry. Penny, like all her generation, preferred gin, but sherry was better than nothing. Roger poured it, and they sat talking of idle matters, with Roger and Moira trying to bridge the gap between the two generations and, naturally, failing completely. In the middle of this, the telephone bell rang, and Penny jumped to her feet.

"I think that'll be for me," she said hastily. "Excuse me, Mummy," and ran out.

"She doesn't waste much time," David, who had no girl-friend in the neighbourhood, commented drily, and Moira answered:

"I expect it's Spike. I saw him this morning, and he asked if he could ring Penny this evening."

Roger seemed faintly disappointed. He had looked forward to an evening of Penny's company after his proposed show-down with David. Now it seemed that Penny's company would not be available.

The telephone was in Roger's study for his convenience. Penny shut the study door, snatched up the receiver, and said:

"Wenton 2030." She heard the voice of Spike answer:

"Hullo, Beautiful. This is Spike. Can you escape after dinner and come and have a drink with me at the Lamb's Head?"

"Bad as it is for you for me to say so, I'd love to,"

Penny told him. "Death and destruction are going to break out in this house after dinner, and I'd rather not be there to see and hear. And for God's sake buy me some gin. I'm drinking sherry at the moment, and there's no kick in sherry."

"That will be wonderful," Spike replied. "Can I call for you at half past eight with the car?"

"Yes, darling. You'll about save my life. Good-bye."

She returned soberly to the sitting-room, and announced:

"That was Spike," as though nobody had guessed. "He wants to collect me after dinner and I said he could."

She glanced brightly at one parent after the other, defying comment. Roger said at last:

"I suppose youth will be served. Let's go and wash, David."

Penny followed them up the stairs, and entered the second bathroom. Moira, who had washed already, remained behind. She envied Penny her assignation very acutely. Moira would have given anything to be out of the house that evening, because she knew Roger was determined to break David, she knew he couldn't, and so anything might happen. In the first bathroom, Roger and David washed their hands in outward amity, and returned to the sitting-room where they were joined soon afterward by Penny, who had re-done her face, and looked enchanting.

The ladies led the procession to the dining-room when Mrs. Haines announced dinner. Moira had done her best with the menu, on the principle of feeding the brutes. There was tomato soup, which everyone likes, roast chickens and two veg., David's favourite steamed pudding, and Roger's favourite savoury. As dinner proceeded, Moira began to lift up her heart. Roger and David seemed to be getting on very well. Penny brought the ineffable charm of female youth to everything she said and did. She refused the steamed pudding with a

polite shudder, for steamed puddings are said to be fattening, and shared Roger's savoury. Moira chose steamed pudding so that David should not eat it alone. A spirit of compromise seemed to be in the air.

As they sat over coffee in the sitting-room, the front door bell rang, and David answered it to spare Mrs. Haines. He returned with Spike in tow. Spike beamed on everyone, and said:

"Good evening, Mrs. Heysham," and to Roger:

"Good evening, sir," continuing:

"Hullo, Penny! You're looking marvellous as usual."

Penny answered:

"Hullo, Spike! Sit down and have some coffee while I get my coat," and disappeared. It occurred to Moira that Penny had not even mentioned that she was dated with Spike, and mourned the modern casualness of the young female to her parents. Nevertheless, she poured coffee for Spike with a smile. Roger spoke about having the engine of his car taken down, and Spike suggested that he should have it looked over. He doubted if a car of that class needed decarbonizing after only 10,000 miles. Probably the oil needed changing.

Penny reappeared in a duffel coat, hatless, with a scarf over her hair. Spike said with his disarming smile:

"Penny promised to come for a run around with me, if you'll excuse us, Mrs. Heysham," and Penny made an exquisite exit, followed by Spike. When the door shut behind them, David commented:

"You can't say Spike isn't a fast worker, but then he's not a faster worker than Penny."

"I don't think that's quite the sort of thing to say about your sister, David," Roger declared reprovingly. "And would you mind coming into the study for a bit? There are one or two things I want to talk about."

David caught his mother's eye, and rose resignedly. Roger led the way out of the room, and the door shut behind him and David. Moira could have wept, but where was the sense in weeping? Instead, she poured

herself more coffee, and lit another cigarette. There was nothing else she could do.

Outside, Penny snuggled in the passenger's front seat of Spike's sports saloon. As he guided it out of the drive, she leaned her right thigh against his left. This simple gesture announced that she still liked him, and he could kiss her as much as he wanted to later, whereupon she would kiss back.

In the study, Roger waved David to an arm-chair, offered him a cigar, which David declined, coming of the cigarette generation, and sat at his writing table. David lit his cigarette composedly, and Roger began:

"I had a rather disturbing telephone call yesterday from Mr. Fastnet. He doesn't seem at all satisfied with you, David."

"Yes, he told me. I'm supposed to be idle and uncooperative, and unlikely ever to make a lawyer. That'll save you the trouble of telling me what he told you."

"Why don't you work?" Roger asked with calculated mildness. "Surely the Army taught you to do your job?"

"Because I haven't the faintest intention of being a lawyer. I hate the law, and everything to do with it. I'm sorry for Fastnet, but you article'd me to him, so I suppose he should blame you really."

"But surely you realize that this situation is impossible? Mr. Fastnet can't waste his time on you if you won't respond."

"There's nothing I can do about it. Till I'm twenty-one I'm a minor, and I can't do anything without your authority. Even I know that much about the law. When I'm twenty-one I shall say good-bye to Fastnet, and begin to do what I want to do, unless you let me do it now. It's sheer obstinacy on your part to keep me at a job I've no intention of doing, so if you like to change your mind it'll be better for both of us."

Listening to David's clear, slightly clipped Army speech, Roger could hardly conceal his surprise. At David's age, he would never have dared to talk to his

father as David was talking. To gain time, and recover his self control, he asked:

"And what is it you want to do?"

"Go into television, though it would probably have to be journalism first. I've no experience of writing."

"That," said Roger contemptuously, "is quite absurd. Only one man in five thousand becomes well-known in television, or so I read, because I wouldn't dream of watching the beastly thing, and he's generally an actor, or she's a titled woman. I should hate to see you starve."

"You don't seem to realize that television's the great thing of the future, now that we've independent television as well as the B.B.C. Television's hardly begun in this country. Look at the size of the American television industry."

"What do you suggest I should do?"

"If you'd pay my London rent for one more year, and give me my allowance for one more year, and let me get away from Fastnet, that's all I shall ever ask you. If I haven't made out on my own by then, I'll rejoin the Army. I don't love the Army, but it would be better than the law. I'm sorry to ask you for a year's allowance, but one can't start anything without a bit of capital. I saved something out of my pay after I was commissioned."

Had David begged and prayed, Roger might have listened, but David was talking in the most business-like fashion, without any emotion whatever. Therefore, Roger let himself go at last.

"I refuse to do what you want me to do, because I'm not mad," he said coldly. "At your age one gets fads, and this television idea of yours is just a fad. Television may come, and television may go—who knows whether it won't be replaced by something more modern in a few years?—but the law goes on for ever. In the law I can put you in the way of making a better living than most men, but I've no influence whatever in television. you'll stay with Fastnet & Quick till you're twenty-one."

By then you may have developed some sense. If you throw up the law then, it'll be your funeral." (

"You never served in the Army, did you, Daddy?"

"No. In the first war I was a child, and in the last I was commandeered into a Government Department."

"Quite. The Army teaches a man to wake up his mind to do what he sets out to do. I've made up mine as regards my future job, so there's no use arguing any more about it. I suppose I shall have to waste nearly a year of my time and Fastnet's till I'm twenty-one, but that's up to you. I'd ask Fastnet to sack me, except that I suppose you'd only find some other solicitor to take me on."

Roger felt suddenly old and defeated, but of this he showed no sign.

"Very well," he answered. "You might go back to Mummy in the sitting-room if you will, please. I have some work to do."

David went back to the sitting-room, and smiled rather grimly at his mother. She looked a question, but said nothing. David asked:

"Can I have a whisky and soda, please?" and Moira indicated the decanter, syphon, and glasses. David helped himself to a stiff whisky, and said unemotionally:

"The balloon's gone up. Daddy's staying in the study because he's in such a temper that he doesn't want to face society. He didn't flare up, because he never does. I explained that I refused to be a lawyer."

Moira listened in silence. There seemed to be nothing to say. David explained what he had suggested to his father, and added:

"But he didn't give me the answer I wanted. I don't know what he'll tell Fastnet. And he didn't say he'd pay my rent for a year and give me a year's allowance so that I can get on with what I want to do. It'll be a frightful waste of time if I have to stay with Fastnet till I'm twenty-one, but what can I do? I'm still a minor."

"Daddy's a realist, David. I dare say it'll all come right when he's had time to think things over."

"He's a realist over anything but me," David answered drily. He finished his drink, and ended:

"I think I'll go to bed and read. Daddy and I hadn't better meet until he's had time to calm down. I'm awfully sorry, Mummy; this must be very uncomfortable for you. Good night."

He went out of the room very upright, very much the soldier. Moira would have liked him to kiss her, but he never did nowadays. She sat brooding until Roger returned from the study, an hour later. He glanced round the room, and seemed relieved to find that David was not there.

"Has David told you the result of our talk?" he asked, helping himself in turn to a whisky and soda.

"Yes. I think you'd be much wiser to let him do as he wants."

Roger said almost plaintively:

"My dear Moira, you've never been a young man, and I have. They simply don't know what they want. One minute it's one thing and the next it's another. It's part of the process of growing up. For instance, it may surprise you if I tell you that I didn't want to be a solicitor. I wanted to go into business. Fortunately, my father wouldn't hear of it, with the result that I'm now senior partner in the family firm, with a very good income, a charming home and wife, and two children who've always had the best of everything. Consequently, I'm not going to let David throw away the advantages I've had. By the time he's twenty-one, he'll probably see reason. I shall explain all this to Fastnet, and ask him to have patience for my sake. It won't hurt him. He admitted that David's very courteous, and popular with other people in Fastnet's office. It's simply that he won't make the slightest effort to learn any law."

"You must do as you please, Roger, and count more. In future, I'm just sitting on the sideline as a spectator. All I hope is that you and David will be civil to one

another, and not make the atmosphere of the house impossible. After all, I've got to live here."

"I think I have reasonable manners, Moira, and I can say the same of David."

"Well," Moira ended, "I'm going to bed. I suppose you'll be playing golf to-morrow?"

"Yes. I've a match fixed up."

"That will keep you and David apart all day, and by the evening I hope everything will have blown over. Good night, Roger."

Snike had driven the car to Dalesbridge, and parked her in the car park of the Lamb's Head, which was the most attractive hotel in the town. He leaned over and kissed Penny swiftly, and she kissed back. Then he opened the door on her side, and she got out. Having locked the ignition and the car doors, he walked beside her into the saloon bar, and asked:

"What would you like, darling?" to which she replied:

"A large gin and lime, please, and probably another after that. Our house is all fire and brimstone this evening. Daddy's quarrelling with David because David doesn't want to be a solicitor, and Mummy's looking like Rachel weeping over her children, and I'm fed up."

"You don't look fed up; you look sweet. You don't mind if I drink beer, do you, because I'm driving, and I never touch spirits when I'm driving. Thank God I inherited my old man's engineering turn, and I never wanted to do anything but follow in his footsteps."

He settled Penny at a table, and ordered their drinks. Penny sipped hers, and said:

"This is divine. I've only had one glass of lousy sherry so far. God knows why people drink sherry. There's just no kick in it."

"I doubt if you need much kick, darling. You're just a mass of it as far as I'm concerned."

"You're the most lecherous young man I ever met, but I like you."

"What would you suggest doing after you've had

your drinks? There's a new picture, 'She Did Her Worst' showing at the Commodore."

"I saw it in London this week, thank you. I'd like to be driven from here to hell and gone, and flee away from the home atmosphere. I get on very well with Daddy, and I don't see why David can't. Well, I do if it comes to that. I'm just being awkward."

"The Army does things to a chap," Spike told her wisely. "I was lucky. I was R.A.S.C., and got a commission as a workshops officer. I just did my own job, except that I had to wear funny clothes to do it. David crashed about in the infantry, and that makes a bloke what's called very regimental. He's probably being regimental with Daddy, and Daddy doesn't like it. All the same, I don't see why he should be a solicitor if he doesn't want to. One has only one life to lead."

"More do I, if it comes to that. Can I have another drink, please?"

"Yes, but you've got to eat some snacks off the bar with it. I'm not going to take you home sozzled, and get a bad reputation with your mother. No doubt Daddy would forgive you, because you're his ewe lamb, but Mummy wouldn't, nor me."

"You're just a tyrant. Heaven help the woman who marries you," Penny answered with mock pathos, but she ate the sandwich he brought her obediently nevertheless. Spike bought himself another half pint of beer, and watched her fondly. She was quite the nicest cheese-cake he knew, and he was really a little in love with her.

Penny finished her drink and her sandwich, and said:

"I've been a good girl, and done what you told me, haven't I? Now drive me to hell and gone, like I asked you to."

Spike helped her on with her duffel coat, and escorted her to the car. Once in it, he drove in the direction of Oxford. He knew all the country round like the back of his hand. Somewhere on the Oxford road a lane turned off which led to nowhere, and one could park

a car on a grass verge, and turn the lights off. Spike found his lane, parked the car on the verge, turned off the headlights and tail light, and switched on the light over the back seats.

"Come and sit in the back; it's more comfy," he suggested, and Penny answered:

"I'd say you have ideas, but to-night I just don't care."

She got out, and entered the back seats, and Spike sat beside her. She slipped off her duffle coat, and, after a long kiss, Spike gathered her onto his knees. He put an arm around her, and held her to him, and Penny pressed her young breasts against him. Then she leaned her cheek against his, and let him get on with his love-making. She wanted to be made love to, the urge of youth was strong in her, so why not? She could trust Spike not to go too far.

At last, languid with kisses she said:

"Darling, what's the time? I'd better be in by midnight."

Spike glanced at his wrist watch and told her:

"A quarter past eleven. We can make it easily."

They went back to the front seats, Spike turned the car, and began the drive home to Wenton. Penny sat back in a little dream. She didn't bother now to lean her thigh against Spike's because all that sort of thing was over for the time, and she felt ineffably content. Spike drove her impeccably to Wenton, and into the drive of her home. She got out of the car, and said to him:

"Don't come in at this time of night, darling. I've scrounged a spare latchkey, so it's quite all right."

"I'll just see they haven't locked you out, sweetie."

She held up her mouth for a good night kiss, opened the front door, and Spike, standing beside her asked:

"I can take you out all day to-morrow, can't I, Penny? We could drive to Oxford, and lunch there, and dine at the Lamb's Head, and so on."

"And all the rest?" Penny replied with an evil smile.

"Thank you so much, Spike. It'll make my day to get away from home just now. You're very sweet to me. Good night, darling."

She vanished into the house, and Spike drove away. He couldn't help thinking that she was quite the most adorable girl he knew.

Penny glanced into the sitting-room, and saw her father reading in an arm-chair.

"Hullo," he said. "You're a bit late, aren't you?"

"The time just fled," Penny answered, as though that were a reasonable explanation. "I've had a lovely time. Good night, Daddy. I'm terribly sleepy."

She left him, and Roger sat thinking his thoughts. Was it safe to let an eighteen-year-old girl be out till midnight with a young man? What did Penny know, and what didn't she know? In his youth no young girl would have been allowed to stay out till midnight with a young man in his car. And then he felt suddenly very old. He told himself:

"I'm out of touch with the young generation. They expect to do as they please. I suppose Penny's wise enough to know how to keep out of trouble, as it used to be called, but I simply couldn't say. And if I told her, she wasn't to go out till all hours with Spike, she'd just sulk, and God knows what she does in London. I suppose all one can do is to let them go their own way, and that for the best."

On Sunday morning, Moira, who was down first, as usual, met Penny descending the staircase in a brown tweed skirt and orange jersey. The jersey fitted her like her skin, so that Moira, after wishing her good morning felt compelled to say:

"Isn't that jersey rather tight, darling?" to which Penny replied simply:

"Men like them like that." She added after a pause:

"I'm going out with Spike all day. He's driving me to Oxford for luncheon, and we shall dine at the Lamb's Head in Dalesbridge on the way back. I can't stand this

house with Daddy and David flying at one another's throats all the time."

Moira did not answer, for answer there seemed to be none. She wished bitterly that someone would drive *her* to Oxford for luncheon, and take her away from the civil war raging in her home. However, there was no one to do it; Moira had never acquired a man-friend to sweeten the acerbity of married life. That sort of thing was practically impossible in Wenton and the neighbourhood. Everyone knew every detail about everyone else. Had Moira acquired a local man-friend, all the tabbies shopping in the main street would have torn her to pieces, whether there was anything to tear to pieces about or not. They would have assumed that there was. It is a bitter business living in a country village, where if a man walks out of his own front door, tabbies watching from behind their window curtains ask themselves:

"Is he going to post a letter, or is he going to the Cat & Saucer to drink?"

To Moira's relief, breakfast proceeded in an atmosphere of calm. After breakfast, the bumble of a sports car's engine outside the house indicated the arrival of Spike. Penny snatched her duffel coat and head scarf, and fled, flinging a:

"Good-bye, Mummy, I'll be seeing you," over her shoulder. Roger, in grey flannel slacks and a tweed jacket, departed to his dressing-room to collect his sacred golf clubs. David told Moira he had a date with Derek Quantock to walk by field paths to King's Wanstead, about ten miles away, where they would have a snack luncheon and a drink in the Ploughman's Arms. Roger's friend with whom he had arranged a golf match arrived in a car to collect him. They had an understanding that each other's cars should be used at alternate week-ends; it was no use wasting petrol on two cars to take two men to a golf course. Roger said, as usual:

"Good-bye, Moira. I shall be having luncheon and tea

at the club house," and was gone. David, having finished a pipe and a Sunday paper, got up and said:

"Well, good-bye, Mummy. I expect I shall have tea at Derek's house," and departed on his way.

Moira was left alone with a blank Sunday in front of her. She might, perhaps, do a bit of gardening, as the air was soft for autumn, though the Vicar would look pained if anyone saw her and told him. He did not approve of golf, gardening, motoring, or anything else amusing on Sunday. But she didn't feel like gardening. She curled up on a chesterfield in the sitting-room, lit a cigarette, and buried herself in the Sunday papers. These lasted her till lunch time. She had asked Mrs. Haines to serve her only some soup, a slice of cold meat and salad and fruit. It took her as far away as possible from family meals.

In the afternoon, she fell asleep in the sitting-room from sheer emotional fatigue. Mrs. Haines was gone, Moira wouldn't bother about tea, and there only remained to bring in supper, since Mrs. Haines had left the table laid, supposing anyone arrived to eat it. But Roger would arrive. He always did, and he was a creature of habit.

At six, Moira made herself a drink, and at seven Roger appeared. They had supper together, with Moira asking dutifully how the golf had gone. David came home at ten, saying he didn't want anything because the Quantocks had asked him to stay for supper. After a half hour's chat with her and his father, with whom he seemed now on quite good terms, he went upstairs to bed.

Roger lay back in an arm-chair, full of the lethargy golf creates in a man who does sedentary work all the week. Penny came home at eleven, stifling a yawn very prettily behind one hand.

"It's the fresh air," she explained. "I've had a simply lovely day, but the air's made me awfully sleepy. I think I'll go to bed, if you don't mind, Mummy."

Moirá had a sad suspicion that kisses had made her more sleepy than the fresh air, but what could one do? After another ten minutes, she and Roger too went to bed.

In the morning, Penny, Roger, and David ate breakfast in a concentrated fashion, their minds already ahead of them in London. They departed together, with brief farewells, and Moira was alone once more.

"And I shall always be alone," she told herself mournfully, "until I'm a very old lady, on the brink of the grave. Penny and David will marry—the young marry very early nowadays—and there'll only be Roger and me left. And Roger will grow more and more indifferent, and I shall never have any more adventure or excitement as long as I live."

Chapter Four

PENNY and David journeyed London-ward in the inevitable third class carriage, while Roger, in his first, greeted his usual crosses. The train started from Dalesbridge, and only stopped at Wenton and Ardersham, so that a first class carriage was never too crowded. After a while, Penny asked:

"Did you fix anything with Daddy, David?" and he answered:

"I told him what I wanted to do, and he just fell back on the usual *cliché* of the older generation that I didn't know what I wanted at my age. Have you any idea at what age one's supposed to know what one wants? Is it a hundred, or what? However, it doesn't make any difference. I shall never be a solicitor."

"I know what I want, and I'm going to get where I want," Penny told him. The young female is more confident than the young male, or more vain. "If you don't go out after what you want, I suppose you won't get it."

"Daddy's financing you in what you want. He won't finance me in what I want. Still, I'll save a bit of money in the next nine months, and then I shall be twenty-one, and can do as I please."

"You should humbug Daddy a bit. I've persuaded him that I was born to be an outstanding model."

"You could persuade him of anything about yourself. You're his pin-up girl. I'm not his pin-up boy."

"Never mind. Cheer up. Life sorts itself out somehow."

At Marylebone they separated, Penny to her training school in the West End, and David to the office of Fast-net & Quick in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He had an idea

that there would have to be a show-down with Mr. Fastnet. Roger would have been sure to tell him what he should tell David. However, there was no show-down. Mr. Fastnet indeed sent for him, but all he said was:

"Good morning, David. Your father wants you to stay here at least till you're twenty-one, and I said you could. He seems to think you'll change your mind about the law by then; so I said you could stay."

"It's very kind of you, sir. I shan't change my mind, and I'm afraid it's a great bore to have me lying about the office. But till I'm twenty-one I have to do what I'm told."

"Well, we all like you as a person," Mr. Fastnet said with a smile. "But, do you think, just as personal favour to me, you could at least make a pretence of studying law? A bit of legal knowledge might come in useful later on, if you buy a house, or take a lease of a flat, or make your Will. Not that I advise you to make your own Will. Many eminent lawyers and barristers have made Wills that were quite hopeless. It would be better for the morale of the office if you appeared to be working."

David, feeling slightly touched by this approach, answered:

"Of course I will, sir. It's very decent of you to be so long-suffering."

"Jolly D., in fact," said Mr. Fastnet, smiling once more. "All right, David. That's a bargain."

Penny, when she arrived at her training school, became another girl. Hitherto, she had been rather languid with love after her Sunday with Spike, but now she dismissed Spike from her mind, and with the predatoriness of the female, concentrated on getting all she could out of her instruction. The Lady who instructed approved of Penny.

"For," reflected the Lady, "she's the only one of the lot who's likely to make good. Most of the rest aren't put together physically in the right way, or they're vain little trouts who just want to show themselves off. But Penny's

put together the right way, and she means to get on. I think she will."

Penny and David were far removed from one another in London, and seldom met except in the week-end. Her hostel was situated in an old Victorian house in Kensington, and David's flatlet in a street off the Bayswater Road. Therefore, they forgot one another when they parted at Marylebone, and only established contact on Friday evenings.

Penny, having reflected on her personal welfare and how to improve it, made a telephone call after lunching in a little *café*, dialling from a telephone kiosk the number of Francis Hetherington. Francis was an artist, who specialized in fashion drawings, and had a studio in Chelsea. Once he had appealed to Penny's training school for a young girl under twenty to model frocks and coats, and hats, and they had chosen Penny. Out of this engagement, from which Penny earned two guineas, ten per cent of which was deducted by the training school, had sprung up a friendship between Penny and Francis. He was twenty-five, and very mature for his age. At eighteen, Penny hung on what she conceived to be his wisdom, while succumbing to his charm of manner, even as he succumbed to hers. But though the association which ensued was not without kisses and fondling, it comprised also an intelligent friendship, from which Penny learned a great deal concerning her chosen job; a different set-up from her friendship with Spike, who represented an almost entirely physical attraction.

Having obtained Francis's number, and heard him repeat it, she said:

"Francis, darling this is Penny. I need consolation, because my life's reaching a difficult stage. Would you care to console me? Could I go over to your studio this evening, and have a drink, and talk?"

"I think perhaps you could, Penny. I was only going round to the village inn for supper and a drink. However, I can shop some supper in the shops, of all places,

and you'd better share it with me and the drinks. I hope you're not in trouble? Naturally, I don't mean what you mean."

"No, not in trouble, merely in what some hymn calls the night of doubt and sorrow. Thank you terribly, Francis. Would seven o'clock be too early?"

"Certainly not. I shall be hungry by seven. I never eat luncheon, and seldom bother about tea."

"You should keep up your strength," Penny warned maternally. "I'll be right along at seven. I'm very punctual. Good-bye."

On arriving at her hostel, she removed the tailored suit she had worn all day, and put on a dress, a yellow dress which flattered her young figure, and suited her colouring. Francis was obsessed with colour and line. Over this she put on her black coat, and black and yellow are an ideal colour scheme for a red-brown type with green eyes, stroked on black *suède* gloves, because Francis was particular about detail, and took a bus to Chelsea.

She knocked on the studio door, as the bell was usually out of action, and Francis opened it to her, standing there smiling down at her, in a slightly worn, but well cut suit. He had a thin, intelligent face, thick dark hair, and slightly melancholy blue eyes. He said:

"Come in, darling. You look sweet in your yellow dress. We've got soup, and cold chicken and ham, and chips, and a Camembert cheese, and there's beer and Scotch. That may, perhaps, keep the wolf from the door."

"Hullo, Francis! Why are you such an angel to me?" Penny answered, walking past him into the studio, which, being a working studio, was picturesquely untidy, but contained a small table with a clean cloth, laid for supper, two small chairs, a divan, and two arm-chairs.

Penny, who at home avoided any household tasks like the plague, insisted on helping Francis carry the chicken and ham from the fridge in his kitchen to the studio, and would have heated the soup, but Francis demurred.

"You'd probably burn it," he foretold with uncanny accuracy, "and I shan't. I doubt if you can boil an egg, but I cook reasonably well. I have to be able to."

Penny accepted this meekly, because she admired Francis, and he was older than she, and he knew everything about the fashion world, for he produced those fascinating line drawings of women's fashions which adorned the women's page of the *Daily Harvest*. Francis carried the soup plates into the studio on a tray, in case Penny spilled the soup, made two whiskies and sodas, and invited her to sit down and eat.

"Not that you've any business to drink whisky and soda at your age," he assured her, "but you're already corrupted, so there's no use my being fussy. You'd only drink it with some other man, and I should be deprived of the pleasure of your company."

"How right you are, Francis?"

Penny ate her good dinner, accompanying it with a little desultory conversation, desultory because she was hungry, and then she and Francis carried away plates and dishes, put them in the sink with hot water and soda, and Francis made coffee. Having carried this into the studio, he caused Penny to lie down on the divan, supported by cushions at the back of her head, drew up a coffee table beside her, sat at her right hand respectfully in an arm-chair, and said:

"You can now come clean. What's eating you?"

"I'm passing out, and I want to get a job, and I don't know how. My training school will never get me a job. They've too many people to try to get jobs for, and who cares about a training school for mannequins? Obviously, it's got an axe to grind, and everybody in the trade knows that."

Francis sat smoking his pipe for a minute, and then turned to Penny and said:

"Excuse me, but are you any good, because I'll never recommend a dear little girl who isn't any good. But, if

you are any good, I might be able to do something for you. I don't promise, but I might."

"My training school thinks I'm some good. Of course, I haven't any experience on the practical side, but I imagine I'm good raw material."

"You were fairly good when you posed in dresses for me."

"Why did you ask me?" Penny inquired out of sheer curiosity. "Chelsea's full of beautiful naked models. I should have thought any one of them would have been better than I."

"Naked models, as you call them, pose perfectly in the nude, but they can't wear clothes. They haven't any clothes. They go about in corduroy slacks and sweaters, doing their best to look like boys, and they're useless for fashion models. But you've the right figure for wearing frocks for the young person, and even the older woman, having seen my sketches of you, thinks she can wear what you've been wearing, poor fool. And that's why I use you instead of a model who, as a rule, poses in the nude. You wouldn't be of any use in the nude. You're too thin."

"I have no intention of posing in the nude," Penny said a trifle haughtily, "so we needn't go into that. But you see, darling, I've got to do something. My course will be over in another two weeks, and I simply can't go and live at home until I get a job, if I ever do. That village gives me the woofits, and David's at daggers drawn with Daddy, and Mummy mopes in the background, and I've only got one boy-friend in the village, and he works all the week. If I had to stay there, and help with the house-keeping, I should go mad. And Daddy won't keep me in London after my training's over. He'll expect me to get a job, and how does he know how difficult it is for a girl who's had training as a mannequin to get a job? He knows sweet nothing about it."

Francis, having digested all this, said:

"I could give you a chit to Aubrey Rhodes. He, as you

know's one of the *grands couturiers*. I did some sketches for some of his designs, and you posed for the sketches. He might fall for you, or he mightn't. It's just a gamble, but you might as well take on the gamble. It's better than nothing, and Aubrey respects my taste in girls."

"Darling, I'll love you for ever if you'll do that for me."

"You won't love me for ever," Francis said candidly. "You won't love anyone for ever for a very long time, and when you do, or pretend to do, it'll be because you've got to marry or bust. But I like you very much as you are, so I'll write to Anthony, and we'll see what happens. I don't promise anything. Aubrey can choose between debts, and titled young ladies, and God knows who. But I think he knows enough to choose between a trained young woman of what's called good appearance and an idiot debt who doesn't know better than to get into a taxi with a young man who's on the chaperons' 'Not Safe In Taxis' list."

Penny then rose up from the divan, and offered her mouth to Francis. She also offered the rest of her for him to embrace, and no holds barred. As far as she was old enough to love anyone, she loved him, and poor Spike was just a week-end convenience. But Francis took no advantage of her gesture. He knew she was very young, and romantically disposed towards a well-known artist who had a studio in Chelsea which she found it pleasant to visit, and could, if tempted have gone to almost any lengths. But he didn't want her to go to any lengths. He had his girl-friends for that sort of thing, and he considered that the bloom shouldn't be brushed off Penny for at least three years, by which time she would be old enough to decide whether it should be brushed off or not. So he kissed her very beautifully, and Penny appreciated this. Spike's kisses were all exuberance and passion, but Francis's were deliberate and insidious. And she was growing into the age when a girl esteems quality rather than quantity in kisses.

Francis took Penny home in a taxi, for artists are proverbially free with money, when they have any, and then, being a methodical young man, returned home in it, and wrote to Aubrey Rhodes. Francis pointed out that Aubrey had been pleased with the sketches Penny had posed for, that Francis found her the perfect model for clothes, and that her training school thought well of her.

"Anyway," he concluded, "you might write and offer her an interview. Even if nothing comes of it, she'll get a kick out of being interviewed by someone of your standing."

Having posted this, Francis returned home, gave himself a drink, and went to bed glowing with the consciousness of having done a good deed.

David, who had given a good imitation of a morning's work after his talk with Mr. Fastnet, telephoned just before luncheon to his girl-friend Margaret, who worked as secretary to the editor of a women's magazine. The switchboard girl said somewhat doubtfully that she would put him through to Miss Goodywood, because the switchboard girl knew that in the Top-Notch Publishing Co., Ltd., private calls to staff in working hours were not encouraged. However, in a moment he heard Margaret's voice reply, and said to her:

"Hullo, darling! Can you come out with me this evening? I need the pleasure of your company, and also a good woman's advice."

"You would call me 'darling' over the office telephone," Margaret answered reprovingly, "and it would serve you right for ringing me in office hours if I said 'no'. However, I've nothing better to do to-night, so I may as well go out with you. You'd better come and collect me at the flat at seven. Good-bye."

Having put down the receiver, Margaret smiled, because she was fond of David, and nothing makes a young woman feel so good as to be cruel to a man she is fond of. It puts him in his place, and gives her a sense of

power. For if she had not power over him, she would not dare be cruel to him for fear of losing him.

Margaret shared a flat in Bloomsbury with Nadia, who worked in public relations. It was cheap, as flats go nowadays, and convenient for both their places of work. Being more or less in the same line, they got on very well together, and took the broad view as to what went on when one of the other's boy-friend came to see her.

Margaret was that rare creature, the perfect secretary, and even her woman boss appreciated her, in spite of woman's inhumanity to woman. Margaret was always perfectly turned out, and at work never wore any jewellery, or near jewellery, but a wrist watch. Her shorthand and typing were perfect, nothing ever caused her to go up in the air, and her filing system was fool proof. She knew that she was earmarked for a sub-editorship when the present sub-editor married in a few months' time. She knew exactly where she was going, and how she would get there.

Reaching home at half past six, she had the flat to herself, because Nadia was going straight from work to a date. Margaret changed from her neat tailored suit into a dress, did her face and hair, gave her finger nails an extra polish, and took a reasonably good fur coat from her wardrobe. She then lit a cigarette, and sat in the sitting-room to await David.

He arrived punctually at seven, said:

"Hullo, darling; you look marvellous as usual," and bent down to kiss her. Margaret knew her lipstick was being ruined, but she was kiss hungry, and made no attempt to escape. In the middle of mild ecstasy, she was able to reflect:

"David kisses better than any young man I know. Those *fräuleins* in Germany must have taught him something." Then David took his mouth from hers, sighed, and said:

"That was sheer heaven. Where would you like to eat, Margaret?"

"Oh, the Caterpillar, I think. That more or less belongs to us by this time."

The Caterpillar was a little Italian restaurant in a street off Shaftesbury Avenue. It catered mostly for the young, though it would not refuse the money of the old, giving them an imitation of luxury at prices they could afford. The food was moderate, but the decorations were carefully designed to appeal to the flamboyance of youth, and an ingenious arrangement of mirrors made the place look twice as large as it was.

Margaret re-did her mouth, and then David held her fur coat for her. She thought he looked very tall and masculine in his blue, double-breasted Guards overcoat. They left the flat and walked down three flights of narrow stone stairs, for alas, the building had no lift. In Holborn they took a bus which would carry them to Shaftesbury Avenue.

With the intuition of the female, Margaret realized that something was eating David, for though he talked to her gaily enough, seeming to be stimulated by her nearness, she sensed doom in the background of his mind. Well, it would come out later, after some food and some drinks. Meanwhile she would do better not to ask questions.

The proprietor of the Caterpillar, who knew them well, gave them their favourite corner table, and when Margaret had decided to choose the *table d'hôte* dinner, because, being feminine and thrifty, she knew it offered better value, David ordered two large gins and tonic. Margaret then knew her diagnosis of David to be correct, because they usually drank small gins and tonic. David picked up the wine list, whereupon Margaret said:

"Don't be madly extravagant, David. I'm going to drink beer after my gin, and you can do the same."

"Never forget I don't pay income tax on my £10 a week allowance," David reminded her, "which makes

it worth a good deal more. However, just as you say. In that case we'll have another gin each after these."

That suited Margaret quite well, because, like most young women, she had no knowledge of wines, and preferred short drinks that acted quickly. They drank their soup without saying much, because both were young and hungry. When curried chicken arrived, Margaret, after being served, announced:

"The rats are eating you, David, in spite of your brave front. Tell me if you like what's the matter, unless you prefer to go on being eaten by rats and preserve your dark secret."

David sighed.

"It's the same old father and son trouble darling. My Papa and I had a show-down this week-end. My boss rang him up and told him I wasn't working, and that set everything alight. Well, I'm not working. I loathe the law. But I'm not twenty-one yet, so what can I do?"

"Of course, you're quite mad, David. If you like to work, you can fall into a wonderful practice one day. You told me so. And this dream of yours of journalism and television is just daft. You don't know a thing about either, and it'd take you years to learn. I'm in weekly journalism, so I know what I'm talking about."

"You like your work; why shouldn't I do work I like."

"I don't like being a secretary much, but that was just to get me into the organization. I'm going to be a sub-editor soon, but keep that under your hat for the time being. That means a much better salary, and the chance of being an editor one day."

"Do you know the first thing about being a sub-editor?"

"I know all about it. I haven't been on an editorial staff for three years for nothing. I can proof-read and make up pages, and I know all our contributors, and which should be chosen for which job."

"Splendid."

"By the way, you want to go into daily journalism."

Can you write shorthand and type? You'll need both, you know. And if you could proof-read it would help to a job as a sub-editor."

"No of course I can't. I've been in the Army for two years. I suppose I could learn."

"You'd better get cracking on evening sessions at a secretarial training place, if you insist on throwing away a good living that's waiting to fall into your lap. They won't teach you shorthand on the *Daily What-Have-You*, and you can't be a reporter without it."

"That might be an idea."

Margaret could see that David was growing more and more obstinate, so she changed her tactics. Somehow, she couldn't see David in journalism. He was too fond of arguing the point, instead, as a beginner, of doing what he was told, and she knew that even in weekly journalism there is no time for arguing the point, added to the fact that juniors who argue the point are most unpopular.

"How," she asked, "does your mother take all this?"

"In a rather grey fashion. I can't wonder. There's a cold war between my father and me every week-end, except last week-end, when it turned into hot war, Penny, my sister's out all the week-end with a local boy-friend, Papa plays golf all Saturday and Sunday, and I go for long walks with the doctor's son, who, fortunate love-child, wants to follow in his father's footsteps, and begins in hospital in a month, so that a good time is had by all, him and his parents. Mummy's all by herself all the week-end, and all the week too for all I know. It must be frightful to be a married woman of the older generation."

"What does she think of your plans?"

"She thinks I ought to be let go my own way, and damn' well drown in it. Then if I'm any good I shall be oh, so happy, and if not I shall have the consolation of knowing that I've only myself to thank. Pretty logical for a woman if you ask me."

"And your father won't hear of it?"

"Not so far. My boss had me into his room this morning. He was quite pleasant. He said my father had asked him to keep me in his office till I'm twenty-one, and that he'd agreed. He then suggested I should make a pretence of working for the sake of the office morale. As he'd been so decent, I agreed. So to-day I've been working as far as my limited knowledge will let me."

David ordered coffee, Margaret refused a liqueur, and accepted a cigarette. As she inhaled the smoke, she was deciding what to say to David. At last she told him:

"You're so awkward at home that you need taking over your Papa's knees and being spanked on the bare bottom for half an hour. I think your Mama has the right idea. You'll never listen to anyone, David, and the only thing to do is to let you go and stew in your own juice, which you mayn't find very pleasant. You won't even listen to me, and God knows I've no axe to grind, and I do have some experience of earning a living."

"I have some charming contacts, what with my Mama and Papa, and you," David answered with a disarmingly smile. "Well darling, we shall see. If you find me standing in the gutter selling matches by the box, I hope you'll drop sixpence on my tray, and not take a box of matches. That's the correct drill. Alternatively, I've been bossed up in the Army for two years, and I don't feel like being bossed up any more for quite some time."

"Let us talk of brighter things. You haven't congratulated me yet on being about to become a sub-editor."

"Oh, I do congratulate you, darling. You'll be the sweetest sub-editor who ever wore *crêpe-de-Chine pants*."

"I don't wear *crêpe-de-Chine pants* in the office. I can't afford to. Sitting on a chair all day would be awfully hard on them."

"When I'm editor of a daily paper, or a television boss, I'll give you a dozen pairs, in assorted colours."

"By that time I shall be too old to care whether my pants are *crêpe-de-Chine* or natural wool."

"Is there any unnatural wool? I just ask for information."

Margaret finished her coffee and smiled at him.

"I adore you when you're being impossible," she said. "You may now walk home with me. I don't want to ride. It's a lovely autumn night, and I've been in an office all day, and a walk will be good for me. So it will be for you. It'll help to clear your brain, and maybe help you see the light. And anyway, nothing could be nicer for you than to walk from Shaftsbury Avenue to Bloomsbury with me, with the roar of London all about us, and the stars looking down."

She went away to powder her face, and David payed his bill. When she had gone, his face set in rather grim lines. It seemed that even Margaret was against him. He had anticipated the sympathy of youth for youth, and not found it.

She came back looking, he could not help admitting, quite adorable, and they went out into the night together. As they walked, Margaret slid her right arm through his left. This charming gesture typified the sympathy she felt for him, although her practical mind couldn't agree with his attitude to life. They talked of anything but David and his troubles, and it seemed hardly any time before they were standing on the threshold of the building in which she lived. She paused and said:

"Come in and say good night to me, you daft thing."

"There's nothing I'd like better, Margaret my sweet."

They climbed the three flights of stairs, Margaret opened her door, shut it behind them and called:

"Cooee, Nadia!" but there was no answer. Evidently Nadia still revelled somewhere with whichever man had taken her out. In the sitting-room, Margaret slid out of her fur coat, and into David's arms. The kiss lasted a long time, and then she drew back her head, and said:

"You're as cross as hell with me, aren't you, but there wouldn't have been any use in my saying that your Papa's a wicked bully, and that you're a poor little in-

jured innocent. Your Papa has logic on his side, even if you don't like his logic. However, you must go your own wilful way, and I won't say another thing, beyond wishing you luck. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"Probably not" David told her, "and in any case a female has a right to her opinion, however scatty it may be. I'm not saying yours is scatty, because that would be being rude to you in your own flat. Give me your mouth again angel, and then I'll go home, and you can sleep in your pure little bed."

Margaret explained:

"It's a divan, as you know perfectly well, not a bed," and gave him her mouth completely.

Outside, David walked to the bus stop where he could take a bus home, climbed onto the upper deck, and lit a pipe. He sat smoking and going over in his mind all that Margaret had said. He respected her, because, at the same age as his, she had already reached a position of some importance, or was just going to.

"But then," he reminded himself, "she wasn't called up, so she's had two years' start of me."

When he opened the door of his one-room flatlet, he felt suddenly lonely. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and opened the envelope of a letter he had found in the hall. It was from his father dictated in Roger's office, and it read:

"Dear David:

"Please forgive a typed letter, but I want a carbon copy of it for the record.

"Having thought things over, I am prepared to give you an allowance of ten pounds a week, and pay the rent of your flatlet for one year after you attain the age of twenty-one. This is on condition that you stay with Fastnet & Quick until your twenty-first birthday. It may be that in the end the law will interest you.

"Frankly, I make this offer chiefly for your mother's sake, because I think she's very unhappy about you.

Personally, I think you're mad not to qualify, and inherit one of the best legal practices in London.

"But then I know nothing about the young generation; and the modern world, where everyone expects to get something for nothing, and a rise in wages if prices go up, is quite beyond me. I was brought up to believe that if I didn't produce enough to earn me a good salary, I couldn't have a good salary.

"All this will seem complete nonsense to you. However, you have my offer in writing, and it will stand. But I shall be glad to have a letter from you, undertaking to stay with Fastnet & Quick till you're twenty-one please; otherwise my offer lapses.

Your affectionate father

"Roger Heysham"

David smiled when he had read this letter. At any rate, it left him safe for nearly two years. Naturally, he wasn't going to be a lawyer, but the interval gave him time to establish himself in the job he wanted. He sat down at a sort of desk-dressing table, and wrote his reply:

"My dear Father:

"Thank you very much for your letter of to-day. I certainly agree to staying with Fastnet & Quick till I'm twenty-one, on condition that you give me ten pounds a week and my present rent for one year after my twenty-first birthday.

"Considering how keen you are for me to become a solicitor, and my refusal to agree, I think your offer's quite splendid. It gives me all I asked you for, and I'm very grateful.

"Your affectionate son

"David."

He went out again into the night to post this, so that Roger should get it next day. Then he returned to his flat, undressed, lit another pipe, and lay in bed making plans.

It was in a way a solemn thought that Roger had given him what he wanted, because now, after his twenty-first birthday, he would need to succeed on his own merits, or be forever contemptible. This reflection did not trouble him for long, for he had all the optimism and confidence of youth. It would be as well to take Margaret's advice, and learn shorthand and typing in the evenings. If the worst came to the worst, one could always earn some sort of a living at that, though he believed men preferred girl secretaries. Then another idea came to him.

"There's that writer fella, Waterleigh, who comes here and stays every so often when he's up from the country. I don't know what he writes, but he seems to make a good living at it, whatever it is. I might ask him if he knows anything about how to get a job on a paper. He's not a bad sort; quite old, of course. He must be forty at least, but he's always been very civil in passing the time of day when we meet. Yes, I'll certainly ask Waterleigh for the gen I need."

David then fell into the healthy sleep of youth, and only awakened just in time to dress and have the breakfast thrown in with his flatlet.

Margaret, in her flat so infinitely superior to David's flatlet, lay awake for a long time. She was trying to assess what David meant to her beyond kisses and love-making, and to make up her mind whether he was a worth-while young man or merely obstinate and too lazy to work at the law. A young woman instinctively assesses every young man she meets, for any one of them may be a potential husband.

"The trouble is, I'm very fond of David," she confessed to herself, "and so it's difficult to take an unbiased view of him. And because I'm very fond of him, I tend to be too critical for fear I shouldn't be critical enough. I think he's mad to throw away the family practice, but it's easy for me to say that when I'm doing exactly what I want to do. If Mummy had insisted on

my being a nurse, or qualifying in domestic science, I should have hated it, and refused, just like David with the law. We younger lot should have some freedom of choice over the work we're going to do."

Then another thought occurred to her, and she sighed.

"If this journalism-television racket doesn't come off, and he can't make a go of earning his living at it, David will be so depressed that he'll feel like going into the river. And I don't want him to be depressed. He's been far too depressed too often lately."

She then, like David, passed into oblivion, and remained asleep until Nadia, whose turn it was to get breakfast, shook her awake and stood over her saying:

"Have you come into a fortune, Margaret, because if not it's time you bathed and dressed, and had breakfast, and went to work. If Miss Whatever-her-Name's letters aren't opened and on her writing table on the dot, you might very well kiss good-bye to this sub-editorial job, and then I suppose you'd go into a decline, and die, and I should have to pack up all your belongings and send them to your next-of-kin."

"Always the little ray of sunshine, aren't you?" Margaret answered with affectionate sarcasm. She and Nadia got on extremely well. "I'll dash through my bath, and be dressed before you can make a pot of tea. Did you have fun last night?"

"Yes, thank you. Did you?"

"On the whole, yes. But I had to console David a lot over having to read law when he doesn't want to."

"How men sponge on us for sympathy, darling. I call it damn' common of them."

Chapter Five

A WEEK later, Penny came downstairs in her hostel for breakfast, perfectly turned out to face whatever the day might bring forth. There were two letters for her, one from Spike, whose handwriting she recognized with evil glee. If Spike's enthusiasm drove him to write to her, in an age when young men never dreamed of doing anything but telephone, he could be useful to her for quite a long time.

The envelope of the second letter featured hand-made paper, not that Penny could recognize hand-made paper when she saw it. She merely considered the envelope very beautiful, and as the address was typewritten she inspected the envelope very minutely, including the post mark, which was W.1., before opening the letter. To her amazement the letter-head proclaimed that it came from Aubrey Rhodes, Ltd. Murmuring a blessing on Francis, she read:

"Dear Madam:

"Mr. Francis Hetherington tells me that you have trained for a career as a model. He reminds me that you posed in some of our gowns for sketches he did for the fashion page of the *Daily Harvest*. He asks me to give you an interview.

"I could see you on Thursday next at 2-30 p.m.

"Yours very truly,

"Aubrey Rhodes."

Having beamed with joy, Penny suppressed the beam, and began on her breakfast kipper.

"Not what you might call cordial," she told herself. "One feels that it cost Aubrey acute pain to write the

letter at all, and that he only wrote it for the sake of darling Francis. When I get to his dump in Grosvenor Street, he'll probably set the dogs on me, if he has any dogs. Still, what a break! I can't kid myself that anything will come of it, but anything might."

After breakfast, she wrote to Aubrey that she would be only too happy to wait on him, on Thursday at 2-30 p.m. the day being Tuesday. She posted the letter on her way to her training school, and apologized to the Lady for being late, explaining why.

"Have you any influence with Mr. Rhodes?" the Lady asked, and Penny answered:

"I'm afraid so, otherwise he wouldn't have looked at me." To this the Lady replied:

"It sounds very satisfactory. Now will you please go out, and make an entrance pretending that you're modelling gowns for Royalty?"

On Thursday, Penny dressed in a very neat tailored suit, surmounted by her silver fox fur. Her hat and gloves and shoes were black, and she wore no ornaments. The idea was that she should be just Penny, as God made her, with no ornaments to distract Aubrey's mind from Penny. Wishing to keep as calm as possible, though she felt anything but calm, she permitted herself the extravagance of a taxi from Kensington to Grosvenor Street.

On her arrival at Aubrey's place of business, a be-medalled commissionaire greeted her, admitted her, and indicated the vast staircase which led from the ground floor to the inner sanctuary. She climbed the stairs, and found herself alone in a vast salon, where everything, including the curtains seemed to be of brocade, except the carpet, which was of a dazzling white, contrasting wonderfully with the rose coloured brocade curtains and furniture upholstery. Hardly had she entered, when a girl of her own age appeared. The girl was as slim as Penny, but, by some feat of mental concentration, or sheer cunning, she managed to make the curved parts

of her body look more curved than the curved parts of Penny's.

"A perfect bitch, no doubt," Penny reflected, "but she knows her stuff."

The girl who was dressed in green which suited her as she was a blonde, said:

"Good afternoon, madam," and Penny answered:

"Good afternoon. I have an appointment with Mr. Rhodes for 2-30," at which the girl seemed mildly surprised, though concealing her surprise in a masterly, or mistressful, manner.

"I will tell Miss Rose, madam," she answered, and curved out of the salon with as much virtuosity as if Penny had been a man.

A few minutes later, a woman in the late forties entered. To look at her, one would have said that she had been drilled by the Guards for at least half her life, and she moved beautifully. She was not so meek as the girl so curved and curving, but she smiled faintly, and asked:

"You are Miss Heysham?" and Penny agreed that she was.

"Please wait for a few moments," Miss Rose commanded rather than pleaded, and made her trained exit. Penny decided that Miss Rose, if she felt like it, would have cut Penny in pieces without a second thought. •

"A woman with authority, accustomed to crushing poor girls," Penny decided, and she was right, because Miss Rose happened to be the head *vendeuse*, and Aubrey's second in command. Even he felt a little afraid of her at times, and all the models trembled at her frown.

She found Aubrey in a large room, done in pastel shades, seated at a vast writing table, making a sketch of a gown on a large sheet of paper. Miss Rose said:

"Miss Heysham's here, Mr. Rhodes. She's the girl you promised to see at 2-30."

Aubrey glanced at his wrist watch, to find that the time was 2-25.

"At least she's punctual," he admitted grudgingly, because his sketch interested him, and he did not wish to be disturbed. "What does she look like. I know I've seen reproductions of the sketches Hetherington did of her in our gowns, but he's sure to have idealized her, and probably gave her another face."

"She isn't quite so frightful as most of them are," Miss Rose said with the air of one making a great concession. "She sits up straight, and doesn't cross one knee over the other, and her feet are posed properly. I don't know what age she is, but she looks very young. She has a sort of spring-like appearance."

"Is she all dolled up to kill in Kensington High Street clothes?"

"No. She's wearing a reasonably presentable tailored suit; not from one of the best houses, naturally, but I don't suppose she could afford that."

"Oh, well, show her in," Aubrey said with a sigh, abandoning his pencil and paper, and slewing his chair round so that he could watch Penny coming through the doorway.

In a moment, Miss Rose had thrown open the door, and announced:

"Miss Heysham, Mr. Rhodes."

Aubrey stood up, managed a smile, held out his hand, said:

"Good afternoon, Miss Heysham. Please sit down," and indicated the visitor's arm-chair. Penny thanked him, and sat. He observed that, as Miss Rose had said, she sat well. Watching her come into the room, he had observed that also she walked beautifully. Now that she was seated, she sat still, without fidgeting. She seemed perfectly composed. She might, from her manner, have been an important client, rather than a poor little girl hoping for a job. That also impressed Aubrey, accustomed as he was for neophytes to fling themselves at him as far as possible, apparently prepared to tear off all their clothes if that would persuade him to engage them.

"And how," he asked, merely to give her a chance to talk to him, "is Francis Hetherington? He's one of the few artists who ought to be allowed to sketch really first class gowns. He has a feeling for women's clothes, unlike most artists, who merely copy what they see in front of them, and miss the soul of the design."

"He's very well," Penny answered with a charming smile. "I had dinner with him the other night, and asked him what I should do now that my training's practically over, and he kindly offered to write to you. I'm very grateful to you for seeing me."

"No blowing off. Perfect manners. And, as Rose said, she has a spring-like look, and the spring collection will be showing after Christmas. I might give her a chance, if only because she behaves, and sits, and walks so well," Aubrey reflected. "I'm so sick of debs., and all the other hard-boiled brats." He said aloud:

"Do you want to work here?" and Penny answered earnestly:

"If I had the chance I should be on top of the world."

"Well, just as a matter of form, you might go over to the door, and pretend you're showing a gown to the Duchess of Faccache, or someone like that, and walk across the room, and turn, and walk back again."

Having done this so often for the Lady at the training school that she could have done it in her sleep, Penny obeyed. Aubrey told himself:

"She's doing it according to the drill. She isn't trying to show off her bottom for my benefit in case it softens my hard heart." He motioned Penny back to the chair, and told her:

"All right, I'll give you a chance. You can have eight pounds a week. It isn't as much as a first-rate shorthand typist earns, but then you've got to be taught everything. I know you're supposed to be trained, but this is the real thing. Miss Rose will probably half kill you, but it'll be good for you."

Penny sighed faintly from sheer delight.

"Thank you very, very much, Mr. Rhodes," she said from the bottom of her heart. "Eight pounds a week's more than I expected to be offered in a first job. I don't care what Miss Rose does to me, as long as I keep on learning, but I'm sure she's very nice. She was charming to me in the salon just now."

Aubrey held out his hand in farewell, Penny made her graceful exit with care, knowing that Aubrey's eyes would be on her back, navigated the salon, wished the commissionaire an affectionate good afternoon, and found herself walking along Grosvenor Street in a dream. Having the afternoon off, she returned to her hostel and telephoned her news to Francis.

"Big stuff," he answered cordially. "Come over and have tea, and tell me all about it."

"Thank you, darling; I'd love to," Penny answered, and rang off, because she knew he was working.

Having changed into the green dress and black coat she had worn for Spike, she took the bus to Chelsea, and Francis welcomed her with open arms. He was still in his overall, but he had laid tea, and the tea only had to be made, and the toasted buns brought from the oven. Penny could not but admire Francis's domesticated ways. Apart from a cleaning lady three hours a day he hired no staff.

"Minus the overall, he sat opposite her at the tea table while she poured out, and asked:

"How did you put yourself over, because that's what you must have done? I only gave you the opportunity to put yourself over."

"I did my little girl act," Penny answered, looking at him in wide-eyed mock innocence. "You've no idea how the little girl act goes over, Francis, even with hard-boiled business gents. Naturally, he made me walk about, and pretend I was showing gowns, but I walk simply beau-ti-fully, and sit properly, like Royalty, so he couldn't pick any holes in my deportment. He's giving me eight pounds a week, which is about two pounds a

week more than I expected. And I owe it all to you, darling. I will leave you everything I possess in return."

"I shall die years before you do," Francis answered gloomily. "I have no will to live. I merely work because to starve to death would be so uncomfortable. My one and only ride in a Rolls-Royce won't be deferred very long. Undertakers always use Rolls-Royces; they may be very old ones, but they look impressive."

"Don't be a morbid ghoul." My next problem is to find somewhere to live. I can't stay at the hostel now my training's over. And I can't afford a flat, even if I could find one, and Daddy wouldn't hear of my kicking around in a boarding house, with men coming into my bedroom by mistake, and all that."

"Give me another cup of tea, and I might be able to help you there. My married sister has a flat in Holland Park, and it's got a spare room, and her husband's in commercial flying, a pilot in fact, and he's only home every so often, and Jacinth's going to have a baby, and it's rather lonely for her. She isn't much older than you are; twenty-one, in fact. Naturally, she wouldn't have the baby at you, as it were. She's going into a nursing home, but the baby isn't due for about six months. We're considered a respectable family, so I don't see why your father should object to your living with Jacinth. I suppose you couldn't stay in the flat with Jacinth away, and her husband coming home, but you could park yourself somewhere, and then go back, unless the prospect of a baby in the flat horrifies you. It would me. Still, six months would give you a chance to find somewhere permanent."

"Why are you such an angel to me, Francis?" Penny asked, making wide green eyes at him, to which Francis replied:

"There's not the slightest use your doing your little girl act at me. I know you too well. All right. I'll ring Jacinth, and then ring you and let you know what she says."

Penny stayed on for a drink, kissed Francis good-bye as sweetly as she knew how, because he had been, and was being, nice to her, and she liked him much more than any other man she knew. On the next morning, the Lady asked her how (she had got on) and Penny broke the news about her new job. The Lady congratulated her, but with suppressed sorrow, because Penny had found the job herself, so that the training school wouldn't get the usual rake-off off her salary for the first month as commission for placing her.

Later in the morning, a telephone call came for Penny. Answering it, she heard a voice like the voice of Francis as a female's voice could be saying:

"Is that Miss Heysham?"

"Yes."

"This is Jacinth Merrion," the voice continued. "I'm Francis's sister. He rang me last night and said you were a friend of his, and wanted somewhere to live, and he suggested you should take our spare room. I'd like it if you would, because I'm alone a lot, and another girl would be company. Would you care to come along for a drink at lunch time, and look over the flat?"

"I'd love to, thank you very much, Mrs. Merrion. Will midday be all right?"

"Perfectly. Thanks a lot. Good-bye."

Being on the eve of leaving, Penny had no compunction about asking the Lady to give her extra time off for luncheon, and at half past eleven took a taxi to Holland Park. She found Jacinth to be living in the ground floor and basement of a converted house, with quite a large garden. Jacinth herself opened the flat door, welcomed Penny, and led the way into a pleasant sitting-room opening onto a balcony, whence steps descended to the garden. Penny sat, with the trained grace of a model, in a large arm-chair, and took stock of Jacinth. She was very like Francis, but much better looking. She was dark like him, and wore a flowered overall. She might be

going to have a baby, but her figure still looked perfectly slim and normal.

"I'd better tell you the worst first," she suggested. "Your bedroom would be in the basement, because the only bedroom on this floor's George's and mine. But the basement's very light, and your bedroom looks onto the garden via a little conservatory. There's a second bathroom, etc., next door to you, so you could have it to yourself. The dining-room's in the basement too, so you wouldn't have far to go for breakfast. Would you like to come and look at the room?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Merrion, I would."

"You might as well call me 'Jacinth,' and then I could call you Penny. You're a friend of Francis, and so one of the family, so to speak."

"Okay, Jacinth."

She followed Jacinth down the stairs which led to the basement, which was large and airy. Jacinth turned left, and at the end of a passage opened a door, through which came a flood of sunshine. She stood back for Penny to enter the room, and Penny fell in love with it at a first glance. It was a divan bed-sitting room, charmingly furnished, the door leading into the conservatory stood open, and gave a view of trees at the end of the garden. Penny sighed with content, and said:

"I'd love to have it if I may, and if I can afford it."

"Oh, well, shall we say three pounds a week, including breakfast and supper? I don't particularly want to make a profit out of the room. The three pounds are just to pay for your keep. My main object is to have someone in the place when George is away. I've only a daily maid, and when you're in my condition—Francis said he told you—you sometimes get the rats when you're alone at night, in case something odd might happen. Nothing odd's likely to happen at this stage, but being alone at night has a psychological effect. Don't imagine I should ask you to cope with anything odd, if it did happen. All I'd ask you to do would be to ring my doctor."

"Thank you very much," Penny answered earnestly, not doing her little girl act, because it would have no effect on another woman, who, no doubt, did her little girl act too. "I'm starting with Aubrey Rhodes on Monday week. May I bring my things next Friday? I go down to my home in the country most week-ends, so you'll get a rest from me now and then."

"But of course, Penny. Come upstairs and have a drink."

On her way back to the hostel, it occurred to Penny that her Mama and Papa knew nothing about her new job, or her new place of residence, and would have to have everything explained to them, and the realization of this fact caused a slight frown to appear on her virgin brow. Then the frown cleared. Truly, Mummy might be difficult, but she had only to do her little girl act at Daddy, and all would be well.

Meeting David early at Marylebone Station, she secured, as usual, a corner seat, and as soon as the train had started said:

"Is there going to be the usual fracas between you and Daddy this week-end, because I'm getting a bit tired of it. It destroys the beautiful home atmosphere, and what have you."

"No. My Papa and I have come to terms; I've agreed to stay where I am till I'm twenty-one, and he's agreed that if by then I still hate the law, and I shall, he'll give me my allowance and my rent for one year. This arrangement is in writing. For all I know we ought both to have made sworn statements before a J.P., but my ignorance of the law is boundless. Anyway, the written statements satisfy Daddy, and he's a good lawyer."

"Good. I've got a job with Aubrey Rhodes."

"And who the hell is he?"

"One of the *grands couturiers*, you uncivilized baboon. I start modelling gowns for him next week, if the head *vendeuse* doesn't kill me first, and I'm going to live with the married sister of a boy-friend of mine."

"Then the fracas won't be between Daddy and me, but between Mummy and you," David said evilly. "When she hears that you, an innocent, repeat innocent, girl of eighteen are going to model gowns, and be stared at by vile men accompanying their wives and girl-friends, and live with the married sister of some man she never heard of, why the reaction will be positively nuclear. You'll probably be taken upstairs, undressed, and spanked."

"I can't see why Mummy should object. Why did I train at a mannequinerie except to model gowns? And I can't possibly live at home and get to work at nine in the morning. And, anyway, Daddy will be very proud of his clever daughter. I'm going to get eight pounds a week, by the way."

At this last news, a slight gloom overcame David. Here was Penny going to earn eight pounds a week at eighteen, while he, at twenty-one, would still be living on an allowance from his father. And, no doubt, Margaret earned more than eight pounds a week, and when she was a sub-editor, would earn still more. It seemed to him that all the girls he knew were putting him to shame, and his male pride wilted.

He heard Penny saying:

"At the worst, I shall only need to do my little girl act at Daddy, and he'll be like putty in my hands. Besides, he won't have to give me an allowance any more, or not more than two pounds a week, instead of ten, like he gives you. By the way, when a girl does her little girl act for you, never take the faintest notice. She'll merely want to get something out of you free, gratis, and for nothing. I shouldn't be a traitor to my sex and tell you this, but you're my dear little brother, and I should hate to think of your being victimized by some ruthless bit who's put the Indian sign on you."

"Thank you frightfully," David answered with some sarcasm, and for the rest of the journey spent most of his time thinking his gloomy thoughts. It seemed indeed

an odd world where girls of eighteen to twenty managed to earn enough to live on, while he earned nothing.

To Penny's relief, when they met Roger on the platform at Wenton, his attitude to David was positively bland, as was David's to him. They walked home in love and charity with all men, and at the house, Moira welcomed them with no anxiety behind her smile. Roger had told her of the arrangement with David, and she had congratulated Roger.

"Everything will be all right now," she had said, "and the week-ends will be peaceful, and lines will stop coming on my face."

As Roger took the latchkey to open the front door, Penny whispered to David:

"Don't say a word about my job. I must time the great announcement to a split second when Mummy and Daddy are merry with wine, or full of dinner, or both."

They drank the usual sherry before dinner. Penny had had the idea of coming down looking very meek and good, and then given it up, because she realized that this conduct would excite her mother's worst suspicions. For what woman, seeing another look very meek and good, can suspect anything but the worst?

After dinner, in the sitting-room, when, if they were not all merry with wine, they were at least full of dinner, Penny, doing her little girl act for all she was worth, said to Roger:

"Oh, Daddy, I've got marvellous news for you. Aubrey Rhodes, the *grand couturier*, has given me a job as a model, at eight pounds a week, so I shan't cost you so much in future. And I've found a place to live; with the married sister of a boy-friend of mine. She's sweet, and she's going to have a baby in six months, and her husband's a commercial bird-man, and away from home a lot, and as Jacinth's alone a good deal, and, in her interesting condition, gets the rats every so often when she's alone, she's very glad to have me in the flat. It's in Holland Park, a very respectable neighbourhood.

It's a maisonette really, and I have a bed-sitting room overlooking a very charming garden. And Jacinth's only charging me three pounds a week, including breakfast and supper, and my own bathroom."

Roger answered:

"Good for you for getting this job. How did you manage it?"

"Well, Daddy, you remember those sketches Francis Hetherington did of me in Aubrey Rhodes gowns for the *Daily Harvest*? I asked Francis if he could give me an introduction to Aubrey, seeing that Francis is a friend of mine, and he did, and I clicked. And then I told Francis I didn't know where to live, and he told me about his sister, and rang her, and she rang me, and asked me to go and see the flat, and Jacinth—that's her name—was sweet. She's only three years older than I am, so we got on. And if you could spare me the odd two pounds a week to make up my income to what you allowed me, until I get a rise, everything will be marvellous."

"But of course I could," said Roger. "I think you've been wonderful."

Moirá, the female parent of a girl, to whom girls were supposed to be an open book, but no modern girl is an open book to her mother, said gravely:

"But Penny, how can we let you go and live with a young woman who's only the sister of some man you've met, whom we don't know from Eve? She may be all right, but on the other hand, she mayn't."

"Mummy darling," Penny said patiently, "do you suppose that the sister of a very distinguished artist isn't all right? Anyway, I've met her, and you haven't, and I assure you she's definitely all right."

"One always suspects artists," Moirá replied. "They have no morals, or so it's said, and perhaps their sisters haven't any either. I think at least we should write to this Mrs. whatever her name is, and ask for references."

"You mean the doctor, or the local parson, or a justice of the peace?" Penny asked sarcastically. "My dear

Mummy, please don't be so medieval. I'm quite capable of judging what a woman's like, and I'm not going into a brothel, if that's what you're thinking."

"My dear Penny, what a shocking word!"

"You put it into my head, Mummy."

"And you say this Jacinth's going to have a baby. How do you know she's married!"

"Because she's my friend Francis's sister, and he's just as respectable as we are, and much better known. And, if you don't believe me, her husband's a senior pilot in the A.B.C. airline, and you can ring them up and ask if Captain Merrion flies for them, if you want to."

She then turned to Roger, and asked:

"Daddy, are you in this, or is this a private war between Mummy and me?"

As she contrived at the same time to do her little girl act at Roger, he fell completely into her hands.

"My dear," he said to Moira, "I really think you should congratulate Penny on getting this job. And, as she's been properly brought up, and wouldn't be likely to have an undesirable man friend, because she could have plenty of desirable ones, and as this Mr. Hetherington's well known, and as his sister's married, I really don't see why Penny shouldn't live in her flat, or maisonette, or whatever it is. You can hardly imagine Penny's being friends with undesirable people."

"She's only eighteen, Roger. Girls of eighteen are very impressionable."

"You're looking back to the days when you were eighteen," Roger said blandly, although he would have made no allowances for David's being only twenty. "They've much more knowledge of the world than you had when you were eighteen, or I had when I was eighteen for that matter. Time marches on, Moira. And surely you can trust Penny, and surely you're very glad she's got this job with one of the most eminent *couturiers* of the day?"

Penny said:

"I think you're being perfectly beastly, Mummy. This is a job in a thousand, and just because I arrange to go to live with a sister of a friend of mine, you make all sorts of absurd suggestions."

All through this, David sat and smiled. He had had the same, or worse, experience at his parents' hands, with the difference that in his case it was his father against him, whereas now it was her mother against Penny.

"Sex will out," David reflected sardonically, "even in families. A father never trusts his son, and a mother never trusts her daughter. I must remember that, in case I ever marry and have a son, or a daughter."

Roger said, as one pouring oil on troubled waters: "Shall we let Penny's arrangement alone, Moira? If anything goes wrong with them, I'm sure she'll tell us."

Accordingly, Moira subsided. Roger was against her, and she sensed the sardonic attitude of David. And she realized that she had taken David's part against his father, so it was only logical that Roger should take Penny's part against her.

"Children," she thought miserably, "are merely a battleground between their parents. The mothers favour the boys, and the fathers favour the girls. I suppose a mother ought to understand a girl better than her father does, and that a father ought to understand a boy better than his mother does, but, as far as I can see, things work the other way round. We're both too rigid about children of our own sex."

The rest of the evening passed pleasantly enough. Penny, having got her own way, little-gilded her father to the point of ecstasy, and David behaved charmingly to his mother, not that he sympathized with her attitude towards Penny, because that would have meant acting as a traitor towards his own generation, but because she had taken his side when he and his father were at loggerheads. But he couldn't suppress a faint feeling of envy towards Penny, because she was going to earn eight pounds a week, though only a girl, and he, a man, a one-time

officer in the Army, had to ask his father to give him an allowance till he was twenty-two. In these days, the instinctive idea of superiority over the female which the average man cherishes, often gets a hard knock from the practical point of view.

Inevitably, the telephone bell rang, and just as inevitably Penny rose to answer it, knowing the call would be from Spike. She came back after ten minutes, and announced:

"That was Spike, asking me to go out in the car to-morrow and Sunday," speaking just as innocently as if Spike had never asked her out before, and that the invitation was a great surprise and thrill to her. No one made any comment, because no one had ever expected anything else. Moira turned in secret that Penny had a private social life of her own entirely composed of boy-friends, and at the same time wished that David had a girl-friend in the village. She felt that he must be lonely and frustrated, but then she knew nothing of Margaret. However, before going to bed, Roger invited David to play golf with him on the following day, offering him six strokes as Roger was a low handicap golfer, and David's handicap rated eighteen. To Moira's surprise, David accepted gladly; she concluded that the civil war was over for good, or at any rate until David's twenty-first birthday.

Saturday and Sunday took on their usual pattern for Moira. She arranged her family's meals, shopped for Mrs. Haines, mended a dress for Penny, and darned David's socks, because he always brought home his darning for her. In the main street, while shopping, she chatted with the local tabbies, who interested her very little. She could have revealed the story of Penny's new job, and new home, but she didn't, thereby sacrificing a mild sensation in Wenton. She knew that by the time the tabbies reached their homes they would have established that Penny was Francis's mistress, and that she was to live with Jacinth purely in order to give him the

opportunity to ruin her, as it is called, over and over again. This did not seem to her exactly desirable. Besides, Penny's new career was no business of theirs, even if they would have thought it was.

The bumble of Spike's sports car had been heard outside the house after breakfast as usual, and, as usual, Penny had fled to take refuge in it. Moira knew that she would not be seen again till late that night. Perhaps it was just as well; Penny had shown a slight coolness towards her mother that morning, and Moira guessed it to be the result of her attitude to Penny's new job and new domestic background on the previous evening.

"And I suppose," Moira thought, walking home with her full shopping basket, "Spike will kiss her all to-day and to-morrow, and Francis Hetherington will kiss her from Monday evening till Thursday evening. I can't imagine it's good for her, and nothing can be done to prevent it. I wonder if Spike and Francis knew about the other, it would make any difference? As one lives in London, and the other in Wenton, and probably each would think that the other hardly mattered to Penny, it wouldn't."

Accordingly, Moira spent her usual lonely week-end, but she felt fairly happy, because Roger and David had concluded a treaty of peace, so that she could relax. On Sunday, Roger played golf again, David spent the day with his friend Derek, and Penny hers with Spike. In the course of their time together, Penny told Spike all her news, and he explained to her what a clever girl she was. Then, rather doubtfully, he asked:

"But who is this fella Hetherington, and how much does he mean to you, darling?"

"He's a very gifted fashion artist, and it's important for me to keep in with him, because one day he'll want me to pose for some more fashion drawings, and that means publicity, which will do me a lot of good in my job. And his sister's a poppet, and going to have a baby." By the inflection of her voice, Penny contrived to suggest

that having a baby set the seal on Jacinth's respectability. "And her husband's an air-line pilot, so he's sure to be a good type. You mechanical blokes all are."

Seeing that Penny suffered herself to be kissed almost as much as he wanted to kiss her, Spike's dreadful suspicions evaporated. He could not know, poor creature, that his kisses were as different from Francis's as could well be, and that the young female esteems variety in kisses. Since, at the moment, Penny had not decided to marry either Francis or Spike, nor did she ever inquire as to their other girl-friends, if any, she felt that she might enjoy being made love to by both with a clear conscience; not that conscience had anything to do with it in her opinion.

Chapter Six

ONE wet winter afternoon, Moira had no choice but to go into Dalesbridge to shop for herself things not to be obtained in Wenton. For one thing, she wanted to see a very good country dressmaker about a couple of blouses. This woman had worked formerly in London, but, having been left a small income, had decided to live in the country and carry on business there. She made exquisite blouses at much lower rates than the London shops. There was also a dress which Moira had decided to have shortened from a long evening dress to ballerina length.

Having made her call on the dressmaker, she walked out into the rain with the idea of having tea at Dalesbridge's smartest tea shop. This would give her a sense of mild luxury, and take her away from the atmosphere of Wenton. At the tea shop one might, with luck, see County ladies, who always appeared as though a horse was waiting for them round the corner, ladies in tweed suits, cut rather badly by a Dalesbridge tailor, brogue shoes made by a Dalesbridge shoemaker, tan cape gloves, and, as a rule, with ash walking sticks. They were a race apart, and they always amused Moira.

On the way to the tea shop, her thoughts miles away, she slipped on the wet pavement, and came down heavily on one knee. For a moment the pain in her knee was so acute that she felt she would never be able to get up. Then she became aware of a tall man in a raincoat bending over her, and saying:

"Please let me help you. May I put my hands under your arms and lift you up?"

Very gratefully Moira agreed, and felt herself lifted

gently to her feet. She stood swaying a little, and the stranger said:

"I'm afraid you're rather shaken. My name's Charles Feltham, and I'm the architect in charge of the renovation of the cathedral. My flat's just across the square. Won't you let me take you there so that you can bathe your knee, and then I can give you some tea. My daily house-keeper's there, so she can help you. And then, if I may, I'll drive you home."

It was so long since a charming new man had come into Moira's life that she could have sobbed with gratitude on Charles's shoulder. However, one couldn't sob on a man's shoulder in the market square on Dalesbridge, so, after a moment's hesitation, realising that her knee was hurting her acutely, she answered:

"Thank you very much, Mr. Feltham. If I've cut my knee I suppose I ought to wash it in case any dirt's got into the cut."

He linked his left arm through her right, and helped her across the square. When they reached his building, he said apologetically:

"I'm afraid there are some stairs to climb, but this house was built before the days of lifts."

Setting her teeth to offset the pain in her knee, Moira climbed the stairs, helped by Charles, and then he opened a door and conducted her into the sitting-room of his flat. She sank into an arm-chair, gazed around, and exclaimed:

"What a charming room!"

"I'm afraid I can't claim any credit for it," Charles told her. "I took it furnished from its rich owners, who are wintering in Jamaica. They let me have it cheap, providing I'd keep on their housekeeper, and didn't have any children, or dogs, or cats. I haven't any children, because I'm a bachelor, nor any dogs and cats, because I travel about the country, renovating cathedrals, churches, and so forth."

He paused, and then asked plaintively:

"Do you think bishops are really necessary? They will lay down the law about church architecture, of which they know hardly anything, and want the most impossible reconstruction work. If you'll wait a moment, I'll call Mrs. Innes. She's the housekeeper."

He went out, and returned with a colourable imitation of Mrs. Haines, who said:

"Good afternoon, Madam. I'm sorry you've hurt yourself. If you'll come into the bathroom, we can bathe your knee."

She opened the door, and Moira hobbled out. Mrs. Innes went ahead to the bathroom, and, having established Moira on the bathroom chair, raised her skirt, undid the suspenders of her right stocking, turned it down, and examined the knee gently.

"I used to do first-aid work once," she explained, "It often comes in handy. I don't think you've done much damage, but the skin's cut, and I'd better bathe it with antiseptic, and put a bandage on it. I'm afraid you've ruined a good stocking."

Mrs. Innes produced antiseptic and a clean handkerchief, poured hot water and antiseptic into a small basin, and proceeded with her work of mercy. Finally, she bandaged the knee, and replaced the stocking. Moira thanked her gratefully.

"It doesn't hurt half so much now," she confessed, and Mrs. Innes smiled. What did an amateur know about the blessings of first-aid? Mrs. Innes could not be aware that Moira had brought up two children, and bathed and bandaged their cuts and scratches a hundred times.

"Now," said Mrs. Innes in the soothing voice she might have used to comfort a scared child, "if you'll go back into the sitting-room, Madam, I'll bring in tea. A nice cup of hot tea will do you all the good in the world."

Moira obeyed, to find that Charles had poured her a liqueur glass of brandy.

"Drink this, please," he commanded, "and then, when you've had tea you'll feel fine."

Tea came, with bread and butter, sandwiches, and delicate china. Evidently the tenants-in-chief of the flat spared no expense, for the silver tea service was Georgian. Moira poured the tea, and Charles sat opposite her, and she felt that she had known him all her life. He had for her the charm of a person who is understanding, and needs no long acquaintanceship before conversation can flow naturally.

He had glanced at her left hand, observed her wedding ring, and having sipped his tea, asked:

"Please tell me something about you. I've told you about me."

"I'm afraid I'm most unexciting," Moira sighed. For some idiotic reason she longed to be able to tell Charles she followed a romantic and exciting career. "I'm just a married woman living in a country village, Wenton that is, with my husband and son and daughter. At least, the son and daughter are there in the week-end. They work in London, and live in London during the week. I just arrange meals, and organize the house, and go to tea with the village females. My husband works in London too, but naturally, he comes home in the evening. We've been living in our house ever since we were married, and both the children were born there. As Penny, my daughter's eighteen, and David, my son's twenty, obviously I know nothing about their private lives. Young people are very independent and self-sufficient nowadays, Mr. Feltham."

"If you'd tell me your christian name, I could call you by it, and you could call me 'Charles.' I hate being 'Mr. Feltham' to people I like."

"My name's Moira Heysham," Moira told him, while a faint touch of colour came into her cheeks, much to her annoyance. Why on earth should she turn pink just because a man asked her her name?

"I like 'Moira'. It suits you."

"'Charles' is a very respectable name," Moira assured him. "There have been many eminent Charleses."

They both laughed at this mild pleasantry, and the ice seemed broken for ever between them.

"Are you," he asked, "in a desperate hurry to get home? It's now half past four. I hope you aren't in a desperate hurry. This is pure selfishness on my part, because I like talking to you. I don't know a soul in Dalesbridge, except the cathedral authorities, whom I find a pain in the neck, and the types one meets if one has a drink at the Lamb's Head."

"I can stay another quarter of an hour," Moira told him. That would mean five o'clock before he had brought his car round to the door. By then it would be almost dark, a most convenient state of affairs, because if anyone in Wenton saw her being driven home by a strange man in a strange car, the news would be all round the village by next day. And then Moira realized, with some astonishment, that she didn't want the village to know about Charles, or that he should meet Roger. She had an absurd longing to keep him all to herself. Penny had her boy-friends, and David, no doubt, some girl in London, and for all one knew Roger might have a woman friend in London. Consequently, why shouldn't she have a man friend as charming as Charles, who was obviously trustworthy, and the soul of discretion, without Roger's knowing, or Penny's, or David's, or the tabbies' of Wenton? Moira knew that this was a very dangerous state of mind to be in, and she didn't care. Her youth had gone, middle-age was upon her, and she longed for a new male interest in her life. If she had lived in London, it would have been easy to acquire, for nobody in London knows, or cares, what anybody else does. In Wenton it was impossible, in Dalesbridge dangerous, but she realized suddenly that she was prepared to take a risk.

"And God knows why," she confessed to herself, "because I've only known Charles half an hour. But he's

so gentle to a woman, and so intelligent, and he has that blue velvet voice, and his brown eyes look so happy when he smiles."

When she judged the quarter of an hour to be up, she glanced at her wrist watch, and was surprised to find that the quarter of an hour had extended to half an hour.

"Please, Charles," she said earnestly, "I must go now, if you're really going to be kind and drive me home."

"Of course I'm going to drive you home. You can't go jumping on and off buses with that knee. I'll fetch the car now. There's a garage at the back of the house."

He paused, and added:

"And please, if you don't mind, don't ask me to dinner out of gratitude, to meet your husband and your son and daughter. You wouldn't be at all the same at home with your family. I'm sure your daughter's very beautiful, but she'd only look on me as an old gentleman. I'd like to keep you just as you are, if I may; the girl I rescued, in a mild fashion, in the market square, and brought home for tea."

Somewhat to her own astonishment, Moira heard herself say:

"Very well, Charles, if that's the way you'd like things."

"And may I ask you to lunch in Dalesbridge soon? I know enough about country villages not to ask you to lunch with me in Wenton."

Moira shook her head sadly:

"If I lunched with you at the Lamb's Head, or the Crown, there'd be sure to be some woman from Wenton lunching there too, and then, as she wouldn't know who you are, the story would go all round Wenton that I'm an Abandoned Woman, who lunches with strange men while my husband's safely in London."

"But why not lunch here? Mrs. Innes cooks superbly."

"If they knew I was lunching alone with a man in his flat, my reputation would go up in flames. However, I'll risk it, I can't think why."

"You'll risk it, as you put it, because you're very nice, and you think I'm trustworthy, which is a great compliment, coming from you."

He went out to fetch the car, and Moira did her face in front of a wall mirror. She felt strangely excited, though there was nothing so far to get excited about. By the time Charles returned, she was perfectly calm.

"She's outside the door," Charles said, referring to the car. He held Moira's coat for her, and as she slid into it she felt a strange emotion at this parting contact. Charles made no opportunity to stroke her, or hold the coat longer than necessary. Instead, he helped her carefully down the stairs and into the car. She could see from the car that he was, to say the least, far from hard up. He drove her to Wenton most carefully, though she could tell at a glance that he was a good driver. When they neared the village, she gave him instructions as to where her house was. She smiled secretly when Charles drew up before the front door. It was usually Spike's car that stood there, for Penny's benefit. No doubt Penny would feel almost shocked at the idea that her mother had been driven home in a strange car by a man she had only met for the first time an hour or two previously.

Outside in the drive, Charles held Moira's hand in farewell, watched Moira open her front door, waved good-bye, and disappeared into his car. Moira turned to look at him, shut the door, and walked slowly up to her bedroom to take off her coat. Having taken it off, she sat on the edge of the bed, and indulged in a little dream. She knew perfectly well that she would lunch with Charles in his flat, and that sooner or later he would kiss her. As this conviction came upon her, she smiled.

"I suppose," she murmured, "this might be called Indian summer. After Indian summer comes winter. If Charles kisses me, he'll probably be the last man who ever does, except Roger, and Roger's kisses are like sister's kisses by now. I don't see how anyone could blame me for enjoying my Indian summer, if I have the

chance. If anyone does, he, or she, can go to hell for all I care."

This was Thursday, and for the next twenty-four hours she found herself listening for the telephone all day, but it did not ring. It wouldn't ring for her in the week-end, because Charles was too intelligent to ring her when Roger, and Penny, and David would be at home. By Monday morning, after the rest had departed for London, and she had the house to herself, she felt sadly convinced that Charles wouldn't ring her. Then, at half past ten, the telephone bell rang. She walked swiftly into Roger's study, and shut the door. Picking up the receiver, she repeated her number. The voice of Charles said:

"Good morning, Moira. How are you? I couldn't ring you on Friday, because all the hours you were alone I was imbrued with the Dean. I really don't know which I hate most, deans or bishops. Can you lunch with me on Wednesday, please?"

Moira, who knew that, for strategic reasons, she should have hesitated, and said:

"Wait a moment while I look at my diary," answered directly:

"Good morning, Charles. I'm very well, thank you. Yes, I'd love to lunch on Wednesday. What time?"

"Could you come at twelve-thirty, and have a drink before luncheon? And have you any special food you love beyond anything?"

"Yes, I'll be there at twelve-thirty. And I'd love a grilled sole, if I may. We can't often get sole in this village. It's all cod, and hake."

"The grilled sole's all yours. I'll be looking forward to Wednesday all to-day and to-morrow."

Oh, heavenly knowledge that a charming man was looking forward to seeing her after she had been taken for granted by Roger and the children for years. A smile curved her mouth, though there was no one to see

"Evidently you're determined to spoil me, but women

love being spoiled," she told him, and tried to remember when she was last spoiled. The effort was vain. "Thank you very much, Charles my dear! I'll be very punctual. I always am."

"Even if you weren't, I'd wait. Thank you for saying you'll lunch, Moira darling. It'll be quite wonderful, for me at any rate."

"How nice of you to say so. Good-bye, Charles."

Monday, Tuesday; there were only two days to wait. She didn't mind waiting, because when Wednesday came the lovely luncheon would soon be over, and anticipation is almost more delightful than realization. She wondered what she should wear, and decided that it should be a dress this time. A dress is more feminine than a suit, and she had a very charming dark red dress, and red was her colour. When Roger came home that night, and sat at dinner with her, he thought how well she looked, and told her so.

"Yes," Moira answered light-heartedly, "I feel very well. One does when summer's over, and winter's coming, and the central heating's on, and one can feel snug and cosy."

"You wouldn't if you had to travel by train," Roger said gloomily. "I can't think why trains are never properly heated. British Railways, I suppose."

On Wednesday she told Mrs. Haines she wouldn't be in for luncheon, and perhaps not for tea. Mrs. Haines remarked to herself how pretty Madam looked. Was she, perhaps, engaged in an adventure?

"Good luck to her if she is. Mr. Heysham doesn't take much notice of her, though she's a good wife to him, and as for that David and Penny, they think of no one but themselves. I'd like an adventure myself, but what hopes, at my age, with my figure? Now, Mrs. Heysham looks at least ten years younger than her age. Some women have all the luck, not that I'm saying she doesn't deserve it."

On Wednesday morning, surveying herself in her bed-

room mirror Moira thought that she looked rather nice in her dark red dress and fur coat.

"Well, as nice as it's possible for me to look at my age," she amended, in the spirit of one who touches wood. But it was her expression which amazed her. It suggested a young girl going to meet her first lover.

In the bus there was no Wenton woman, and Moira breathed a sigh of relief. Had there been one, Moira would have had to shake her off somehow in Dalesbridge, and advance on Charles's flat by a roundabout route. As it was, she walked straight to his front door, to be admitted by Mrs. Innes.

"Good morning, Madam," said that excellent woman. "I hope the knee's much better?"

"It's quite well, except for a very faint bruise. You were marvellous," Moira answered gratefully, and Mrs. Innes preceded her to the sitting-room. Mrs. Innes had no doubt what was afoot, because on Wednesdays she had the rest of the day off after serving luncheon. But, having been in good service in her time, among people for whom inhibitions did not exist, she felt not in the least shocked.

"It'll be a good thing for Mr. Feltham. He's far too much alone. And the lady's very charming, and at her age I daresay she's fed up with marriage, like we all get sooner or later."

As Moira entered the sitting-room, and Mrs. Innes shut the door behind her, Charles got up from a writing table on which were spread architectural plans, smiled into Moira's eyes, took both her hands, and said:

"Good morning my dear. How sweet you look, and what a charming dress."

"Good morning, Charles. Do you really like my dress?" Moira answered. "At any rate, it came from London, not Dalesbridge. There's a frightful atmosphere about Dalesbridge dresses. They're made to prove that the wearers are good women, and I really don't see why

one should look like a good woman, even if one is one, do you?"

"I know, you're a good woman, but thank God you don't look like one!"

Moira sat in the arm-chair in which she had sat before, thus recapturing to a small extent. Charles made two dry Martinis, adding ice and a scrap of lemon, which seemed to Moira a delightful change from the family sherry. Roger despised cocktails, which he described as rot-gut. Charles handed her one, raised his own, and said:

"Here's to us all and the happy days we're going to have together!" Moira answered:

"Happy days, Charles," and they both drank. As he turned to put his glass on the writing table, and sit where he had been sitting when he first entered, Moira felt that he had a great tenderness for women, and suddenly she longed more than anything for him to have great tenderness for her. It was so long since a man had shown her great tenderness.

"You'll stay for tea, won't you, darling?" Charles was saying. "This is Mrs. Innes's half day, so I'll have to get it, but she'll leave it ready, as she always does, and, being a bachelor, I'm very domesticated."

"Yes, Charles, I'd love to stay for tea. But you mustn't drive me home this time. Nobody saw us last time, but it doesn't do to tempt providence. If you continue to drive me home, I shall have to ask you to dine with us, and you don't want that."

"Do you want it, Moira?"

"Not much. It's more fun having you all to myself. We're not doing wrong, and in marriage one lives so much in public. It's nice to live in private once in a way."

Mrs. Innes announced luncheon, and served exquisite grilled sole. After she had brought coffee into the sitting-room, she inquired:

"Will that be all, sir?" and Charles answered:

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Innes. You excelled yourself over luncheon, if I may say so without seeming to reflect on your other luncheons."

Mrs. Innes smiled.

"Thank you, sir. Good afternoon, Madam," she said, and retired discreetly. Half an hour later, they heard the flat door shut behind her.

Charles stood up, took Moira's coffee cup, drew her to her feet and took her in his arms. Their kiss was as lovely and emotional as Moira had anticipated, half tenderness half passion on Charles's part. She had felt quite certain that she would be kissed and made love to. That was why she had accepted Charles's invitation to luncheon. She reflected with inward amazement that all her married life she might have been indulging in affairs outside marriage, because she felt not the slightest sense of guilt.

"I suppose," she concluded, with her mouth against Charles's, "that women haven't really any more moral sense than men. They may put up a front that they have, but that's for men's benefit. And I shall go home and meet Roger at dinner just as calmly as if I'd spent the afternoon sewing."

Charles led her to a chesterfield, sat down, and drew her onto his knees, so that she rested with her head against his shoulder and one arm round his neck.

"This," he said, "is the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me, and it was all quite by chance, too. You fell at my feet as though you'd come down like rain from heaven, and then, when I thought you the most adorable creature I'd ever met, you liked me too. I'm the luckiest creature that ever existed."

"You," Moira replied, leaning her cheek against his, "haven't all the luck. I'm luckier than you. You're a bachelor, and can take your fun where you find it, and have all the girls you want, when you want them. I'm married, and live in a village, where the walls of one's house might just as well be of glass, for all the privacy

one gets. I really believe the village ladies always know when I change my underwear. I don't know when they change theirs, because I simply don't care, but they do. Everyone else's business is their business, or so they think. And I've been living in Wenton for twenty-two years, and this is the first time I've been kissed by any man except my husband, apart from the inevitable occasional pawing at dances by other women's husbands who've got lit up. But even that didn't happen often, not that I like it, because the married behave very strictly at our few dances. Penny, and her lot, go out into the woods with boys and aren't seen for a long time, and everyone pretends they're still on the dance floor, because that's the best way out, but wives only dance very decorously with other wives' husbands, and never disappear with them into the woods."

"I'm not passionately addicted to odd girls. I seem to need a woman with whom I've some mental link, as I have with you."

"How do you know you have, Charles? My mind, if I have one, is a complete mystery to you. Even you can hardly fathom the mind of a woman you've had tea and luncheon with once."

"Instinct," Charles told her, with his lips against her hair. "Or intuition, if you prefer it, though that word's sacred to females, as in the expression: 'A woman's intuition.' What does your intuition tell you about me?"

"Just that you're sweet, and I'm very fond of you, even on this short acquaintance. Do you mind? I haven't been very fond of a man for such a long time, not since I was first married, in fact, and it's a perfectly heavenly sensation. The odd thing is that my conscience doesn't object to my being very fond of you. I think that speaks well for you, because consciences are frightfully irritable things."

"You'll come and lunch again, won't you, darling?" Charles asked anxiously, because Moira seemed to be so analytical that he feared her emotions were less deeply

involved than his. He didn't even consider his conscience. He held that a conscience should be well-trained, and not presume to interfere with one's pleasures, legitimate and otherwise.

"Yes, Charles, if you're kind enough to ask me. Do you think I ought always to lunch on Wednesdays, when Mrs. Innes goes off the gate? Mightn't she begin to think things?"

"If she does, she wouldn't say a word to anyone. In her younger days she worked for Noble Families, and before the war, when Noble Families had money, and didn't have to show the ancestral home to the mob at half a crown a crack in order to live, you've no idea what went on in the Castle, or the Manor House, or whatever it was. And any maid who talked, would have been flung into the moat with a ton of bricks attached to her neck."

"Dear Charles you arrange your life very well."

"I didn't arrange Mrs. Innes. She went with the flat."

"It's all bound to come out sooner or later," Moira said dreamily. "Some Wenton woman shopping in Dalesbridge will trail me to your door when I'm not looking, and only thinking of meeting you, and then the tongues of scandal will wag all round Wenton, and the news be relayed to friends of Wenton women in Dalesbridge. Do you think the Dean, or the Bishop, will mind when he hears of it? Would you be fired for desecrating the Cathedral, being a wicked man who was carrying on with someone else's wife, or said to be?"

"I don't think the Dean, or the Bishop, would want to listen. You see, I happen to be the greatest expert in the country at my job, so I'm too useful to fire."

"I thought you must be. Nobody but a great expert could afford a car like yours."

"Anyway, you won't give me up, will you Moira? I couldn't bear it if you did."

"No," Moira sighed; "I won't give you up, because I need you so much more than you need me. It's quite fatal for me to tell you so; I ought to pretend to be in-

different, so as not to put you off, but I can't. I never knew how lonely I've been for years and years till I met you. And if I don't pretend to be indifferent, you'll get bored, but I can't help it if you do. Whether you know it or not, you've rescued me from premature old age, and I shall never forget it. I never knew how young I could feel until you kissed me."

"You're just a lit-tul girl, darling. Every woman's just a lit-tul girl when her emotions are satisfied, and I appear to satisfy yours, just as you satisfy mine."

Moirra sat up, and patted her disarranged hair into place.

"No one would believe it of me who knew me," she said solemnly, "which shows you your power over women. Even my friend Janet, w^ho's husband's a doctor, while Janet's been a nurse, so that she knows Everything, but Everything, wouldn't. Not that she'd be shocked, she'd just think it incredible of poor Moirra, who once took all her troubles, family troubles that is, to Janet, and Janet gave brisk nursely advice, featuring the well-known brightness of nurses, which never leaves them, even when they're married, and haven't patients any longer."

"I should always have believed it of you."

"Evidently I've every appearance of being an immoral woman."

"Not immoral, merely natural. Love's natural to a woman, so if she can't have it from one man she takes it from another. That seems to me merely to exemplify the logical, practical feminine mind."

Moirra turned to Charles and kissed him all by herself.

"I couldn't be logical or practical with you, and that'll be my downfall in the end," she said half mournfully. "When you realize how much you mean to me, you'll get fed up, and go away. I shan't reproach you, so don't be frightened. I shall merely replace the ten years you've taken off my age, and settle down into the complete *hausfrau* I've been ever since my children were born."

Charles gathered her once more in his arms, and kissed her tenderly.

"I can't go away till the spring, because this Cathedral will keep me here till then," he assured her. "Once you begin on these ancient fabrics, you never know where they're going to land you. You chop out a bit of crumbling stone, and then the whole lot tries to collapse on you. And it will be wonderful to make love to you in the spring, because you always look like spring to me."

"I'm in the autumn of my life, and winter's just round the corner," Moira told him with mock solemnness. "Do you think we might have tea now, Charles, because time's getting on, and I have to flee, like Cinderella from the ball, on the stroke of five."

When they had had tea, and it was time for her to go, she put her hands on his shoulders and looked up into his face.

"You mustn't come down to the door with me, because some godly woman from Wenton might be passing, and see us together, and godly women have the most frightful minds. I can let myself out. And, Charles, whatever happens, I won't give you up, as long as you want me. I shall know at once when you don't want me, and then you won't see my behind for dust, so have no fears. I'm the ideal woman, whom you can hang up on a nail when you don't want her, and take down when you do. In my circumstances, I have to be. Good-bye darling, and if you ever ask me to lunch with you again, it'll be just heaven, though I'm not scrounging."

"Next Wednesday, at twelve-thirty?"

"I hoped you'd say that, you angel. Yes, I'd love to. I shall only exist till next Wednesday. *Au revoir*, my dear Charles."

He stood and watched her go down the stairs. Before she opened the street door, she turned and waved. Then the door opened, and she was gone.

No Wenton woman saw her go. She walked calmly to her bus, and was carried to Wenon. She marvelled at

her calmness. Half an hour previously her pulses had been racing under Charles's kisses and now she might have been returning from a shopping expedition. When she reached home she examined her mouth carefully, in case kisses had bruised it, but there was no sign. She washed her hands, changed her dress, did her face, and went downstairs to the sitting-room. When Roger reached home, and came into the sitting-room for his sherry, she greeted him with as much poise as though Charles had never existed. He answered her briefly, because until he had drunk his two sherries he never came to life. Moira could understand this. Two railway journeys of thirty miles each, travel on the underground, and a day's work in a responsible position were enough to tire any man of forty-six.

What astonished her was that he appeared to perceive no difference in her. She felt revitalized, almost reborn, but apparently she showed no trace of these miracles wrought by Charles. Watching Roger drink his sherry, she thought:

"I suppose it's true that if a husband's been with another woman, his wife knows as definitely as if she'd seen them together, but a woman can go with another man, and return home, and her husband will never know. I must say this is most convenient for women, but a bit hard on men. I suppose the explanation is that they have a sense of guilt, and we have none."

All that winter, up to Christmas, Moira continued to see Charles, and he made love to her by him. The luck that favours lovers held. She was never seen coming out of his flat, or going into it, by any woman from Wenton. Mrs. Innes remained the soul of discretion, and never by the slightest sign revealed that she knew the love relationship between Moira and Charles.

The coming of Christmas raised an almost insoluble problem. Charles wanted to give Moira a Christmas present, but what could he give her that wouldn't be seen by Roger, and commented on? Finally, he decided

on a dozen pairs of silk stockings. A woman might very well buy herself silk stockings, and I would have the consolation that his stockings were caressing Moira's legs. She gave him a gold cigarette lighter. He had a lighter already, but it was only chromium plated. When he received it, he felt a pang. The lighter would last for ever unless he lost it, but his silk stockings would disappear in time, and he longed to give Moira a permanent keepsake. When he told her, she only smiled.

"How odd men are!" she told him. "Nothing could make me happier than your stockings, because they're so much more intimate than a lighter. And I don't need a permanent memorial of you, my dear. I shall remember you long after you've forgotten me, when I'm a very old lady. And do you know why? Because you're my last lover. When you're gone, I shall never have a lover any more, and a woman always remembers her last lover until the angels come for her, and, for all I know afterwards."

Chapter Seven

PENNY arrived soberly for her first day's work with Aubrey Rhodes. Jacinth had wished her luck, for which she had returned genuine thanks, and she had travelled to Grosvenor Street in a grave and slightly grim frame of mind. This new job she looked on as a serious undertaking. It meant, so to speak, victory or Westminster Abbey. She went into it with the steel-lined determination of the female who knows what she wants and is determined to get it. There could be no question of failure. To fail would mean dependence on Roger once more, and Penny, older in wisdom than David, if not in years meant to have independence if it killed her to win it. David might be content to take money from Roger, and do more or less what he was told, but Penny wasn't. She had made up her mind to be her own mistress, cost her what it might in effort.

Accordingly, she returned the commissionaire's greeting with only a small, thoughtful smile, which he understood perfectly. He remembered his first days in the Army, and he had a very good idea of what Miss Rose would do to Penfry.

Miss Rose wasted no time. Directly Penny had crossed the salon, and penetrated behind the scenes, Miss Rose came forward.

"Good morning, Miss Heysham," she said. "I understand your name is Penelope, so you'll be Penelope here. I suppose you think that now you've been trained in deportment you know all about modelling gowns. Well, you don't. You've never had any to model, or not ones like ours, and I don't suppose you've ever met our class of customer. They're very sophisticated, so you have to

suggest sophistication too. However, I shall take you in hand, and if you learn quickly all well and good, and if not, out you go. These are Averil and Marilyn, our two other models. I dare say they'll give you a few tips."

Averil and Marilyn smiled at Penny in quite a friendly manner. They had both gone through the treatment by Miss Rose, and they imagined that Penny felt in need of a little friendship. Miss Rose went on:

"Averil, put on the midnight blue gown, and come into the salon and show Penelope how to model it."

Averil, who was clothed simply in a slip and her underwear, obeyed, and she and Penny followed Miss Rose into the salon. Averil paused while Miss Rose and Penny took station where the clients would be, and then retired behind the damask curtains, and made her entrance onto the floor. She walked gracefully across the space reserved for models, paused, turned, and walked back. Her poise, like her figure, was perfect. Her face was completely blank. Miss Rose commented to Penny:

"Notice that there was no smiling, no wriggling. A model isn't getting off with a man, or not in this place, and no woman client's interested in her. The client's only interested in the gown she's showing. Men accompanying clients may be interested in the model, but that's no reason for her to smile, or wriggle her hips. If he wants to get off with her, he can make his own arrangements outside. Thank you, Averil. Mr. Rhodes wants to fit a gown on you. Penelope, you'd better go with Averil, and see how to behave when a gown's fitted on you. But take off your clothes and get into a slip first."

Duly equipped with a slip, Penny followed Averil meekly into Aubrey's room. He wished them good morning, and took the embryo gown from a girl who stood with it slung over her arm. The gown appeared to Penny to have no sewing so far. Aubrey draped it on Averil with no more emotion than if she had been an inanimate dummy, and began to take it in here and there, fixing it

with pins. Averil stood like a statue, showing no more emotion than Aubrey as his hands wandered over her. This went on for about an hour, and Penny, tired from standing, wondered how Averil could endure her ordeal without dropping in her tracks.

At last Aubrey said to the girl who held the pins:

"Ask Miss Rose to come here, please." The girl departed, and Miss Rose appeared. Aubrey said:

"Good morning, Miss Rose. This is the general idea. Get the thing tacked together, and then I'll fit it again. It isn't right yet, but I shall get it right in time."

Back in the changing room, Averil took off the gown, and smiled at Penny.

"You look startled," she said. "You'll get used to being fitted. Aubrey's very good. He doesn't make a fitting an excuse to paw. Anyway, he's so used to us, and he'll get so used to you, that as far as he's concerned we're just clothes horses. Did you ever hear of a *grand couturier* marrying a model, or even living in sin with her? They probably get as bored stiff with us as we do with them."

"It's the standing," Penny sighed, and Averil answered:

"You'll get used to that too, and also to changing gowns umpteen times a day. One gets used to anything in time."

Penny got used to everything in a few weeks. The great day came when she was allowed to model gowns for customers. Miss Rose watched her with hawk's eyes. When the modelling was over, she said half grudgingly:

"You didn't do so badly, Penelope, except that to me you looked slightly anxious. You must never look anxious. It gives the impression that we're eager to sell gowns, whereas in fact the clients are lucky to be able to buy them. Please don't look anxious again."

Penny answered:

"Thank you very much, Miss Rose," and for one second considered that lady. She was nearer fifty than

forty. What *corseterie* she wore nobody knew, but to outward appearance she had the perfect figure. She carried herself to perfection, and handled clients with the tact of an ambassador. Penny decided:

"The woman's a miracle. If I look half as well as she does when I'm fifty, I shan't complain."

It always seemed very rewarding to return to Jacinth and the flat at Holland Park. For the first few weeks, Penny was too tired to talk until Jacinth had given her a drink. Then Jacinth listened enthralled to accounts of what went on *chez* Aubrey Rhodes, Ltd. She would never be able to afford to be dressed by them, but she loved to do so, as it were, at second hand. After the drinks, Jacinth served supper; her daily maid had long gone, so Jacinth cooked the supper, if it was hot, herself. For the first few weeks she refused to let Penny help, because Jacinth saw she was tired out. After that, Penny insisted on helping. She would never have dreamed of helping Moira, but Jacinth was different. She belonged to Penny's generation, and she was going to have a baby.

Penny felt glad to return to work after Christmas, because Christmas in Wenton had seemed dull. Roger always loathed Christmas, and Moira, who, like most women, loved it, had seemed preoccupied. That was because Charles had left Dalesbridge to stay at his London club for Christmas. Moira realized that she couldn't have seen him at Christmas, but at least she could have pictured him in his flat. She had never seen his London club, and consequently couldn't picture him.

To Penny, after the exotic surroundings of Aubrey Rhodes, Wenton seemed duller than ever. The enormous Christmas dinner of turkey, plum pudding, and so on, didn't appeal to her. She would rather have dined with Francis in his favourite Chelsea restaurant. David ate his dinner nobly, because he was young and hungry. They all went round to Janet and Edward Quantock's for drinks on Boxing Day, and Penny amused herself by hypnotizing Derek, which was so easy as to be hardly worth doing;

but Derek had no sister to charm David, and he felt odd man out. Spike was overwhelmed with relations staying with his parents, and couldn't get away to take Penny motoring. Thus Penny regained Jacinth with a feeling of relief. But even Jacinth wasn't quite the same for some days. Her husband had been home for Christmas, and now he was somewhere in the region of Nairobi, and she missed him bitterly. When once Penny found her with red eyelids, Jacinth said apologetically:

"I know I've been howling, but don't take any notice. It's just the reaction from having a lovely Christmas with George, and not having him any longer. You rather want your husband around when you're in my interesting condition, and when he goes away, the bottom seems to drop out of the world."

Not long after Christmas came Aubrey Rhodes's spring collection, in preparation for which all his staff had more or less torn themselves to pieces. Penny congratulated herself on having so far satisfied Miss Rose as to be allowed to model some of the masterpieces, although two extra models, veterans of twenty-one or so, had been engaged for the occasion.

Penny modelled designs for the young women, and received gratifying rounds of applause, which did not turn her head in the least. She was far too intent on success in her job to have her head turned. As Jacinth had said once, a girl who caught the attention of press and the wealthier public could make two thousand a year as a model. Two thousand a year looked good to Penny. It would be a long time before David made two thousand a year, if he ever did.

In spite of the ordained blank expression, and eyes fixed straight ahead, Penny could not help noticing that a young man, escorting a young woman, who sat close to the space where the models went through their paces was taking an unusual interest in her. Out of the corner of one eye she could see that he was good-looking, but rather pale. The young woman wore a wedding ring, but

Penny felt convinced that she was not the young man's wife. When Penny had made an exit, the young man, whose name was John Lanyon, said to the young married woman, who was his sister, Lois Sandcroft:

"You ought to have a drag here, Lois. You spend enough money in the place. Can you ask that girl with the red-brown hair and fascinating green eyes along to your house for cocktails one evening? If I try to ask her out, I shall only get the brush-off from the management."

"You're the most lecherous type I know, John, and she's probably frightful in private life. However, you're a bit of a hero just now. I'll do what I can when the show's over. Miss Rose should be willing to oblige me."

Consequently, at the end of the showing, Lois, who, like her brother John, was an hon., both being the children of Lord Heritage, beckoned Miss Rose with her eyes, and said:

"Good afternoon, Miss Rose. I think your new collection's simply wizard. I shall come and buy far more than I can afford, and tell all my friends."

"Thank you very much, Madam."

"And, Miss Rose, could you let me meet that charming girl with the red-brown hair—Penelope I think her name is. I'd like to ask her for cocktails. My brother's fallen for her in a big way, and as he was badly wounded in Malaya, and has come home on long convalescent leave, I like to do what I can for him. The cocktails would be at my house; all very respectable, and well chaperoned."

Miss Rose was essentially a woman of the world. She knew that the Hon. Mrs. Sandcroft wouldn't want to be mixed up in any scandal between her brother and a model. The contact might be advantageous for Penny, and Miss Rose knew that Mrs. Sandcroft wasn't shooting a line when she said she was coming back to buy. Therefore Miss Rose said:

"But certainly, Madam. If you'll wait one moment, I'll introduce Penelope."

She disappeared behind the curtains, and reappeared with Penny, now dressed to go home. Miss Rose said:

"This is Miss Penelope Heysham, Madam. The Hon. Mrs. Sandcroft wishes to meet you, Penelope."

Miss Rose vanished tactfully behind the scenes, and Lois smiled at Penny. Penny said:

"How do you do, Mrs. Sandcroft," vetted Lois's clothes with a trained eye, and waited. Except that one didn't dare offend a customer, she couldn't have cared less about Lois, and she longed to get home.

"I wanted to ask you, Miss Heysham," Lois began in her charming voice, with her charming smile, "if you'd be very kind and come and have cocktails at my house one evening soon? We live at 3002, Wilton Crescent. My brother, who came here with me's very anxious to meet you. He's given long convalescent leave in England after being shot up in Malaya—he's an officer in the 120th. Rifles—and I'm trying to do all I can to keep him happy. He's staying with us indefinitely, or till he gets fed up with us."

Penny thought swiftly:

"The 120th. are a good regiment, or so they think. It can't be the beginning of an intrigue, because Lois Sandcroft wouldn't want an intrigue in her house. The brother looks quite interesting, and Miss Rose will never forgive me if I refuse." She replied accordingly:

"Thank you Mrs. Sandcroft. I should like to have cocktails with you very much."

"Would the day after to-morrow at half past six do?"

"Perfectly, thank you." The day after to-morrow was a Thursday, so that Penny wasn't due to go down to Wenton, and she was dining with Francis this evening.

"That's terribly nice of you," Lois said gratefully. "John would never have forgiven me if I hadn't persuaded you. Good-bye, Miss Heysham, and I'll look forward to seeing you."

She returned to her brother, and as they left the salon, John asked:

"Well?"

"I've fixed it for you, you betrayer of young women," Lois answered. "It was practically blackmail, because I had to explain everything to Miss Rose, the head *vendeuse*, and as I'm considered respectable, Miss Rose would have killed Penelope if she'd refused an invitation from a good customer. So she's coming for cocktails at six-thirty on Thursday, and the rest's up to you. All I ask is that if you intend to ruin the girl you won't try to do it in my house."

"Penelope," John mused. "A charming name. No doubt she's called Penny when one gets to know her. I haven't any intention of ruining her, darling. All I want is a beautiful emotional friendship with a girl who has red-brown hair and green eyes, and walks as a princess is supposed to walk, but doesn't always. And I shan't drag her to your house. We shall dine and lunch at charming places, and motor out into the country, and commune under God's blue sky. Spring isn't far behind, and the crocuses are coming up, and the sap is beginning to think of rising. I shall create a lovely spring-time idyll before I go back to the Regiment, if I ever do; but I wouldn't put it past them to invalid me out. Not that I care very much; I never meant to make a career of the Army, but, as you know, the men of our family always soldier with the 120th."

"You were always rather daft," Lois said consideringly, "but you're nice at the same time, and I should think Miss Penelope might like you. That is, if she isn't *affichée* to some man already, as I imagine she must be; but then, one always has to take a chance in this life, doesn't one?"

"Too true, one does."

Penny raced home, as far as the rush hour would let her race, had a drink with Jacinth, slid out of her suit into a dress, huddled into her fur coat, for the night was cold, and took a taxi to the Chelsea restaurant where she

and Francis always dined. She found him waiting for her in a fair lounge suit. He said:

"You look pregnant—I don't mean what you mean—pregnant with news, achievement, or something," he said. "Perhaps you'll tell me, or perhaps it isn't fit for me to hear. I've got our favourite table. Come and have a drink, and be spoiled."

"You say the most divine things, and you *do* know how to look after a girl," she told him gratefully. "I'm all destroyed by modelling gowns all the afternoon for our spring collection, and as if that wasn't enough, the Hon. Mrs. Blank asked to see me, and invited me to her house for cocktails, because, it seems, her brother, who was with her, has fallen for me. And he's home from Malaya on convalescent leave, he being an officer in the 120th. Rifles, and you know how stuffy they are, all that he wants he must have, if Lois—that's his sister—can arrange it. So, as the head *vendeuse* would have killed me if I'd refused, because Lois spends a packet with us, poor little Penny will have to be the victim of a rich man's whim on Thursday at 6-30 p.m., and the prayers of the congregation are asked for her."

Francis ordered Penny a second cocktail, and shook his head.

"Never trust the aristocracy. They haven't had any morals since the reign of Henry VIII, or even before," he warned her. "Nor do they understand love. All they want is to get into bed with a girl, or man, skipping all the exquisite preliminary approaches, which I consider damned crude of them. But I daresay you can look after yourself."

"Probably I can, darling. I've managed to so far, even with you. Shall you take me home to your studio, and kiss me after dinner? I feel the need of being soothed, and Made to Forget."

"That had always been my intention," Francis replied politely. "Besides, I shall try to set a standard for this

damaged aristocrat when he thinks he knows you well enough to make love to you."

"Shall you mind if he does, Francis?"

"Alas, I've no proprietary rights in you, or I should, in those circumstances, strike him dead at my feet."

He took Penny back to the studio, and made a little attractive love, and then she went home. On Thursday evening she changed once more into a dress, and departed for Lois's house in Wilton Crescent.

She found it to be one of those establishments in which the stranger feels at home from the very first. Lois and her husband were charming, and the only other two guests proved to be a young married couple still too engrossed in one another to take more than a polite interest in the other members of a party. When Penny entered the lounge and a maid announced her, Lois rose, held out her hand, smiled a welcome, introduced her husband, who appeared to adore Lois, and her brother. Finally she introduced Penny to the two love-birds, and John brought her a cocktail and sat down beside her.

"I pestered Lois to ask you for cocktails because you looked so marvellous at the dress show," he confessed, and that seemed Jolly D. for anyone so exclusive as a captain in the 120th. Rifles, who usually behaves as though everyone else smells. "It was very sweet of you to accept. I expect you're snowed under with invitations."

"Your sister's much too charming for me to wish to refuse," Penny answered with monumental tact, "and I'm not snowed under with invitations. Beyond the girl in whose flat I live, and a man who's an artist with a Chelsea studio, I have very few friends. My home's in the country, and of course I know people there. I go down most week-ends."

That, she thought, gave John the picture. It now remained for him to wean her away from Francis, and Spike, if he could. At the moment, she didn't think he

could. He had the excellent manners of the young regular soldier, but he seemed to her very young beside Francis and Spike. It came, no doubt, of never having had to struggle for existence. One could hardly imagine the son of Lord Heritage, one of the few remaining rich men of his rank, struggling for existence.

"Then, perhaps," she heard John saying, "you'll let me take you around a bit? I've a fairly good car, and they didn't shoot me in my arms and legs, so I'm still a safe driver. And I should love to ask you to lunch with me, if I may."

"Luncheon's quite out," Penny answered with a pretence of grief she hardly felt. "I'm at work all the week, and, as I said, I go home at week-ends."

"Then would you dine with me one evening?" John besought her. He had only suggested luncheon because this meal takes place in daylight, and that might reassure Penny, if she had any doubts about him. "We might dine at the Délices. It's a good spot, as I suppose you know, though rather given over to theatrical and film people, and there's a garage nearby, so that I could collect you in the car and take you home in it."

"And drive me out into the country one fine night, and lure me into the back of the car in some secluded spot, and go through the usual routine," Penny thought sarcastically. But aloud she said:

"Thank you, I'd like to dine with you one evening at the Délices," because it could not but be good from a business point of view for one of Aubrey Rhodes's models to be seen at the Délices dining with a son of Lord Heritage. Miss Rose would surely lend her a gown which had been shown a good many times for the occasion. Penny might even, in this celestial robe, create a mild sensation, and publicity is the very stuff of a model's career.

"That would be wonderful," John said, as, though he really meant it. Penny considered that probably he did. He seemed to be greatly impressed by her, possibly because he imagined that all models were not only

decorative but good, or bad, for anything. "When can you spare me an evening?"

"Oh, next Wednesday, I think," Penny answered. It would do him good to wait for her, and she really didn't care whether she dined with him or not. For her it was more a business date than a romantic occasion. One of those devoted women who do the rounds of the restaurants and night clubs, and provide the details for gossip pages, might see them, and between the news interest of Messrs. Rhodes Ltd., and a son of Lord Heritage, write them up; and then, if she described Penny's gown, as she would, a gratified smile would modify the iron features of Miss Rose.

"That's charming of you. May I fetch you in the car, and at what time?"

"At eight, please. It takes me ages to smooth away the cares of the day. You don't know what hard work being a model is."

"I wouldn't have thought it would take you ages," John replied, giving Penny a photographic look which analysed not only her dress but herself. "May I have your address, please?"

She told him, and he took out a pigskin bound diary with a gold monogram on it, and made a note of the date and the address with a gold pencil. Penny wondered ironically if he had ever before heard of Holland Park. Lois's husband brought them second drinks, and Lois, having perceived the brief ceremony with pencil and diary, concluded that John had made his date, and gathered Penny and him into the general conversation. Penny concentrated on Lois's husband, as the young bridegroom was still too infatuated with his bride to care about any other girl, and after a decent interval, left. She would have left earlier, except that John might have thought that she only came to make a date with him, and that, the date having been made, was only too glad to go home.

"May I drive you to Holland Park?" he asked eagerly,

as he escorted her towards the front door, but Penny shook her head.

"No, thank you, but if you could ring me a taxi I'd be glad. As a matter of fact, I'm not going home. I'm going on somewhere else first."

Her disappointed admirer procured the taxi, and Penny gave her driver Francis's address. She thought it would be good for John to believe that she was going to visit another man. He saw her tenderly into the taxi, and shut the door. When he was out of sight, Penny pulled back the glass slide, and gave the driver Jacinth's address. She reached home, went into Jacinth's sitting-room, threw down her fur coat and said:

"Darling, I've been introduced to a young male hon., who's an Army captain, in the 120th. Rifles, and, as you know, the 120th are the 120th. He came with his sister to our collection, and as the cocktail party took place at his married sister's house—she buys dozens of gowns from us—everything's on the level so far. No doubt the hon. John has every intention that it shan't stay on the level, but I can handle him. He's taking me to din. at the Délices on Wednesday, and I shall borrow one of our gowns which has been shown too much to be in a state to be sold and make history at the Délices. You sit still, and I'll fix supper, because I've had two cocktails, and I'm full of alcoholic energy."

"Coo, you don't half see life," Jacinth responded. "If you could really fix supper, you'd have my blessing. I feel a bit umpty this evening, for some reason."

Miss Rose on being approached for the loan of a gown, and being told that Penny was to dine at the Délices with the hon. John, said, on reflection:

"You may have the off-white cocktail dress, Penny, with the gold edging to the *décolletage*. For heaven's sake don't spill soup all down it, and take it home and bring it back in a suitcase. I don't want to see it all crumpled, as though you'd slept in it."

"Thank you very much, Miss Rose."

On the following Wednesday evening, Jacinth stood looking at Penny in the off-white dress. Jacinth had never worn such a dress, and never would. She said:

"You look a positive dream, Penny," and consoled herself with the thought that soon she would have a baby, but Penny wouldn't.

At ten minutes to eight a car stopped outside Jacinth's maisonette, and a few moments later the front door bell rang. Penny rose from her chair in the sitting-room, made a face at Jacinth, and went to open the door. Before her stood John, in an evening dress overcoat, smiling as though he saw the heavens opening, and indeed he hoped he did. Penny smiled back, offered him a slim, beautifully manicured hand, and said:

"Hullo, John! Come in and meet Jacinth. It's her place. I'm just a p.g."

John, who had not the faintest wish to meet Jacinth, came in as though to meet Jacinth were the one thing he wanted. Penny led the way to the sitting-room, where Jacinth sat knitting a little garment, and said:

"Oh, Jacinth, this is John Lahyon, my friend. Jacinth Merriion, John."

Jacinth stood up, shook hands, said a few conventional things, and offered John a drink, which he declined on the plea that he was driving. They all chatted for a minute, and then Penny and John said good-bye. Outside, Penny beheld a Bentley saloon, in which John established her tenderly, slid into the driver's seat, and proceeded in the direction of Piccadilly. Penny said:

"Don't you think Jacinth's sweet? She's going to have a baby soon, and I'm a mean pig to leave her alone. But I don't go out often. Her husband's a civil aeroplane pilot—he was in the R.A.F.—so he's away a lot, and it's rather lonely for Jacinth in her condition."

"Your friend's very charming," John answered politely, but his mind was all on Penny, and, anyway, the R.A.F. was the junior Service. They attained the

Délices, and John left Penny in the foyer while he garaged his car.

When he returned and had deposited his overcoat, Penny saw that he wore a very beautiful dinner jacket. She still wore her fur coat. The unveiling ceremony should take place in the restaurant, where the full gloss of Aubrey's cocktail dress could burst upon the assembled company. Evidently, John was well-known at the Délices, for the head waiter fawned upon him, and led them to one of the most desirable tables, against a wall in the centre of the restaurant. Having seated herself, Penny slipped off her fur coat, and let it hang on the back of her chair. She perceived that many a female eye focused itself balefully on the off-white dress, while the eyes of males dissected the weave. John gazed at her entranced, and said:

"What a quite too marvellous dress, Penny," to which Penny answered negligently:

"Yes, it's not bad. The head *vendeuse* lent it to me to come out with you in. It's been worn a lot by models, so we can't sell it as new, and one more wear won't make any difference one way or the other."

This was all part of her calculated appearance of indifference to John. He had to be made aware that she was not impressed either by his being the son of Lord Heritage or an officer in the 120th. Young men, in her opinion, should be suitably crushed, except of course Spike, and darling Francis, before being finally approved. This attitude had its effect on John, who was accustomed to be courted by debt and things, and had never before been treated almost casually. He made up his mind that sooner or later Penny should be reduced to reason.

He began with the old opening:

"Tell me about you, please. I hardly know anything except that you model for Aubrey Rhodes."

"That's about all there is to know," Penny answered mildly, her eyes glued to the menu the head waiter was offering her. "I told you my home's in the country, and

I just lodge with Jacinth during the week. When I left school, I trained at one of those dumps where they teach girls who want to be models, and then, on the strength of a recommendation from my darling Francis, whom I told you about, Aubrey Rhodes gave me a job. I'd posed for some fashion sketches Francis did of Aubrey's gowns, and these appeared on the women's page of a daily paper, so the publicity helped. And now I exhaust myself all day long showing gowns to women old enough to be my mother and they imagine poor creatures, that the gowns will look just as well on them as they do on me; but then, women always believe what they want to believe, don't they?"

The wine waiter brought the cold cocktails, and John consulted the wine waiter learnedly about the vintage of champagne. Soon a gold foiled bottle appeared in a gleaming silver ice bucket. Evidently, Penny considered, this was the life. The splendours of dinner with John didn't turn her head in the least. She merely felt amused to think that John hoped her head was being turned; for if a young man can turn a girl's head, much may be added to him. She went on:

"And now, pray tell me about you. All I know is that you're Mrs. Sandcroft's brother, and that you were wounded in Malaya."

"Oh, it was just an ordinary show," John answered with the deliberate understatement of the 120th., "and I happened to stop a couple. It's a bit of a bore, because I wanted to soldier on for a couple of years at least. But if they invalid me out, I have plans laid. School and the Army's all my history, but then a fella can't make much history if he's only just turned twenty-five, can he?"

Penny reflected that Francis, at the age of twenty-six, was already a well-known artist, much sought after by magazines and newspapers, but she did not say so. Instead she said, lifting her cocktail glass:

"Well, here's to your military future, if that's what you want. I dare say they won't invalid you out, and when

I'm a grandmother, you'll be a field-marshal, acclaimed and admired by all who read the papers."

They ate their delicious dinner in peace and harmony. Penny felt that John had begun to respect her because she wasn't taking him seriously, which was what she wanted. An orchestra played softly and seductively, and presently they danced. Penny perceived that there were not many wicked actresses dining, because those in work were playing in their respective theatres, but a handful of female film stars were giving their public performance of film stars in social surroundings, and a few American accents pinged through the restaurant. One or two of these cast glances at Penny's dress, and she longed to go over to them and say:

"This is an Aubrey Rhodes dress. If you'll come and see us, I can model gowns even more dazzling for you;" but naturally, that was impossible.

Being young and resilient, she enjoyed her evening. Every time John took her in his arms to dance with her, she could sense him becoming more and more impassioned, which was just what she wanted. She had no intention of suffering on account of John, but she hadn't the least objection to his suffering on account of her. He had arranged an introduction to her because he thought she was an abandoned model, ready for anything, and he must be taught that she was nothing of the kind.

The evening passed swiftly, as all joyous evenings pass, and it became time to go home. Penny made the ritual journey to the powder room to do her face, and rejoined John in the foyer. Her fur coat now shrouded the rapturous dress, but to John she looked even more rapturous than her dress. He had brought his car round to the entrance, and now handed Penny into it as though she were something immeasurably precious. They began the journey to her home through a lamp-lit London.

It occurred to her that John was driving as slowly as possible to prolong his evening with her, which seemed slightly flattering. On the other hand, she had to get up

early in the morning and begin another hard day's work, and, now that the party was over, she longed for bed.

Finally, for all John's efforts to delay the parting, they arrived at her front door. John switched off the engine, and pulled on the hand brake. He leaned across Penny to open the door on her side, and as he did so her hair brushed his forehead. This ecstatic contact ruined what was left of his self control. He took his hand off the door latch, gathered her to him, and kissed her mouth.

"You're perfectly darling," he told her, "the most darling girl I ever met."

Penny made no attempt to kiss back. It seemed that she hardly realized he was there. Then she drew away, and said politely:

"Thank you so much for taking me out, John. I enjoyed it terribly."

She curved out onto the pavement, and ended:

"I'm so sorry I can't ask you in, but it's too late. Good night, John." She glided up the steps, opened her front door, and was gone.

Chapter Eight

DAVID, sitting alone in his flatlet after supper, glanced over the shorthand exercise he had just finished, pushed the papers aside, lit a pipe, and lapsed into a reverie.

It was March, and his shorthand and typing course had only a month more to run. Margaret had given him one or two dictation tests, and pronounced favourably on his speed. His instructor had pronounced favourably too. His typewriting had passed muster, and now he merely put the final polish on his achievements of the immediate past. He still worked at the office of Messrs. Fastnet & Quick, but that would end very soon. He would be twenty-one in September. Being a September baby accounted for the extreme neatness of his wardrobe in his bedroom at Wenton, which Moira had once remarked. All September babies are perfectionists.

David lit a second pipe, and reflected:

"I'm due to push off on my own six months from now, and so far I've done nothing about getting another job. I must find one on a newspaper, in order to get into the middle of things, and find out about T.V., but how?"

Then he remembered that Mrs. Forbes, who ran the flatlet house, had told him that evening that Peter Waterleigh, who made his living by writing in some strange way, would arrive on the day following.

"I thought you'd like to know, Mr. Heysham," she had added, "because Mr. Waterleigh's a friend of yours."

Well, hardly a friend, David told himself. They passed the time of day when they met in the hall on Peter's periodic visits to London, and once or twice they had met in the local, and bought each other drinks. Was that,

David wondered, 'sufficient ground for asking Peter's advice on a journalistic career? He decided that it would have to be.

Accordingly, next day, he brought home a bottle of whisky and two siphons of soda water, and left a note for Peter asking him to come in for a drink that evening or the next. At eight p.m. David heard a knock on his door, and opened it to see Peter standing outside.

"Nice of you to ask me round," he said in his dry, forty-six-year-old way. To David, aged twenty, he could not have seemed older had he been a hundred. "I can never resist the charms of friendship and alcohol. How have you been getting on since I saw you last? At that time you looked fairly browned off, if I remember rightly."

David welcomed Peter warmly, indicated the one arm-chair, poured two drinks, and sat on the edge of his divan. The electric radiator was switched on, and an air of cosiness and comfort distinguished the flatlet. Peter took a sip of whisky, and continued:

"What is it you want to ask me? Being to an extent psychic, for a writer has to be psychic in order to understand women, who are his main market as readers, I'm sure you want to ask me something."

Feeling slightly guilty at being found out, David answered:

"My father wants me to be a solicitor, but I loathe law, and I want to get a job on a daily paper. I've learned shorthand and typing, which, they tell me, every reporter needs. I thought that, as you're in the writing racket, you might be able to tell me how to go about things."

"I'm not a newspaper man, thank God," Peter answered piously. "I'm all for a peaceful life, and you could hardly call a daily paper man's a peaceful life, whether he's on the reporting or the editorial side. I do a bit for the daily press, but I only deal with the Features Editor, and write my piece in the quiet of my home, and

post it to him. The main thing is, do you know anybody in Fleet Street? An introduction from one of the brotherhood always helps. Or of course, if you know a managing director, you could be fairly sure of a chance. You could always be kicked out if you were no good."

"I don't know a soul in Fleet Street. All my connections are in the legal world."

"Have you ever written anything, and had it published?"

"Not a thing. I haven't long come out of the Army."

"You seem to be rather in the position of someone who'd like to be invited to dine with Her Majesty at Buckingham Palace. One thing's just about as easy of accomplishment as the other. As I told you, I'm no good for getting you a newspaper job. But I know people who could, if they wanted to. I belong to the Cannibal Club, where these types congregate. If you'd care to dine there with me one night, I could introduce you to one or two of them."

"Thank you very much, Waterleigh. I'd like to more than anything."

"Well, what about to-morrow night, at, say, seven? Then we could have some drinks in the bar before dinner. The bar is rather the life and soul of the Club."

"That would be grand. It's very decent of you to bother."

"Not a bit. I've had my own ups and downs before I got settled. One should always give the other fellow a helping hand if one can."

Peter had a second drink, and went his way. David sat dreaming of dinner at the Cannibal Club. There he would be right in the movement. As a result, anything might happen.

The Cannibal is one of those warm, cosy clubs where newspaper men and writers congregate, and everyone knows everybody else. Directly David had hung up his overcoat, he sensed the atmosphere of the place. Peter took him into the bar, ordered drinks, and, having greeted

one or two friends, glanced about him with a questing gaze.

"I'm looking for victims to wish you on," he explained. "Ah, there's Bill Shawburn, the News Editor of the *Daily Harvest*, in his usual corner of the bar. Let's go and have a crack at Bill."

They crossed the bar to where sat a man of middle age and middle height who wore dark-framed glasses, and a slightly crumpled suit. His smile was disarming, but when he was not smiling he looked a tough type, which was only natural, as news editors have to be tough types. Peter walked up to him and said:

"Hullo, Bill! This is my friend David Heysham. He wants a job on a paper. Give him some good advice, and I'll buy you a drink."

Bill Shawburn gazed reflectively at David, said good evening, and then asked Peter:

"Is there anything the matter with his head? Doesn't he know that there are thousands of blokes who want a job on a paper, and that Fleet Street's littered with the bodies of the unsuccessful?"

"Youth will be served, Bill. Give him the works by all means. It'll be most instructive for him."

Bill turned to David, and asked:

"What have you written so far?"

"I haven't written anything so far. I just want to know how to start."

"Then you aren't news," Bill said wearily, and this is the ultimate condemnation from a news editor. To him a thing, or a person, is either news or not. If not, he has no further interest.

"Oh, go on, Bill," Peter urged. "He's determined to stick his neck out. Tell him how to stick it, as it were."

"If he can write shorthand, and I don't suppose he can—"

"I can," David interrupted. "I've spent months learning."

"Well, that's something. You'd better try to get a job

as a reporter on the *Clumpington Gazette*, or some other provincial paper, the smaller the better. Then you'll be able to see how the wheels go round. You can see better on a small paper than on a London daily. After a couple of years of that, you might try for a job in London. That's the best advice I can give you."

"I've promised my father, who's a solicitor, and expects me to take over his practice sooner or later, to stay in the law office where he put me till next September. How can I write in the meantime?" David asked rather desperately. The whole world, including Bill Shawbarn seemed to be against him.

"Have you any Ideas?" Bill asked, giving the word a capital "I" as far as is possible vocally. "Ideas are priceless. A Good Idea may make a big story. Without Ideas no paper can exist."

"I have a few, but they aren't written up."

"Thank God! If you'd written them up, the next thing would be you'd ask me to read them. Well, write them up, and if they don't make you feel sick when you read them yourself, send them to the Features Editor. He buys outside stuff sometimes. But don't send them to me. I only deal in news."

David thanked him, and then Bill bought Peter and David and himself another drink each. After that, Peter took David away to the dining-room, and ordered dinner.

"Don't let Bill depress you," he advised. "All newspaper men are as tough as hell. They have to be, because it's a cut-throat job, and they may be out on their ears themselves at any moment. I think the idea of writing something for a Features Editor's a good one. If nothing happens, you'll have had some practice. If he takes your stuff, it's read by some millions of people. I'm afraid they don't buy much outside stuff nowadays; it's all written by the staff. But you never know. The main thing, as Bill says, is to hit on an Idea that's too good to refuse."

David ate his dinner thoughtfully. Evidently the world

of journalism was indeed remote from the calm processes of the law. He asked Peter:

"How did you manage to get where you are, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Just by hard slogging and having a skin an inch thick. If you're sensitive, for God's sake give up the idea of writing. Otherwise you'll break your heart, and get nowhere."

"Nobody's very sensitive after two years in the Army," David answered grimly, and Peter smiled.

"I hadn't thought of that. Anyway, good luck, and if you don't succeed, there's always your father's practice to inherit."

"Thank you. I'd rather die."

Peter mused thoughtfully on the imbecility of the young, who, having a silver spoon put into their hands, so to speak, throw it away. However, he had done all he could for David, and the rest was up to David. Peter bought him coffee, took him back into the bar, and introduced him to various men whom David found desperately interesting because either they wrote, or worked on papers, or were even involved in television. His admiration for Margaret increased one hundred per cent. She, now a sub-editor, belonged to this exclusive band of people who put papers together by some mysterious sleight of hand. At eleven, when the bar shut, Peter suggested a return home. He had contacts to make in the morning and he wished to sleep and wake fresh for the fray. But David lay awake a long time in his bed. The evening had given him an entirely new outlook on the career he wanted. It wasn't going to be in the least easy even to begin, let alone become a success.

He put aside all thoughts of the *Clumpington Gazette*, or whatever the provincial paper might be. He wanted London or nothing. In London one might achieve fame; in Clumpington, or its equivalent, one might scrape a living, and that would be all.

He decided to ask Margaret to dine, and tell her what

Bill Shawburn had told him, and asked her opinion. Frivolous and light-minded as women were, they had a certain intuition where a man they liked was concerned.

Margaret came to dinner two nights later at their favourite Caterpillar, and at once David sensed a difference in her. Authority, and a magazine sub-editor has much authority, had developed her, and given her self confidence. She listened to David without interrupting, and then said:

"I should think Mr. Shawburn was about right. Most successful newspaper editors began in the provinces, and then came to London. But then you don't want to go to the provinces, so that's out. You must try your damndest to get a job on a London paper, but you'll find it difficult with no experience, and no record of any writing work. I mean, if you'd written a successful novel it might help, but you haven't written anything."

"Neither have you, and you're a sub-editor."

"I have, you know. I've written quite a bit for what we call 'departments'; how to feed baby, how to make up your face, what to do when your love affair goes wrong, and so forth."

"What do you know about feeding baby?"

"There are ways and means of finding out, if you know the ropes. As secretary to the editress of *Dazzle*, I learned all the ropes. And as a sub. I have to write quite a bit. For instance, if an article doesn't fit, I write a bit more onto it, whether I know anything about the subject of the article or not. This is all very good training, especially as it has to be done like lightning if one's going to press. The one unforgivable crime is to keep the machines at the printing works waiting."

"I can't try for a job till September, so what do I do in the meantime?"

"I should do as Mr. Shawburn suggested, and try to write an article for the Features Editor. If he doesn't take the first, and he won't, write another, and keep on writing. Even if he throws out the lot, you'll have had

some practice. But pray write the articles the proper length. Count up the words in one of the articles they publish, to find their limit. Beginners always go rambling on. And please make up your mind in detail about what you're going to say before you start writing. Construction's everything. When you've done your construction, the article writes itself."

David ordered coffee and brandy, and sighed.

"You pro.'s are all alike," he said sadly. "You don't give a bloke the slightest encouragement. Everybody who ever worked on a paper had to start without experience, even on the *Clumpington Gazette*. I'm no more ignorant than they were."

"Yes, darling, but on the *Clumpington Gazette* you'd be properly bashed up if you didn't do your stuff the right way, just as I should be if I didn't do mine the right way. That's the way one learns. I doubt if a big London daily has time to bash up beginners. They want people who had the raw edges taken off them on the *Clumpington Gazette*. I had mine taken off when I was a secretary. I learned that one simply can't afford to make mistakes, because they give other people so much trouble."

"All right. Let's talk about something else. I hardly know you now you're a sub. The job's given you an extraordinary poise and confidence. Even your clothes are different."

"If a sub. didn't have confidence in herself she wouldn't last long, and as for my clothes, I've more money to spend now, because I get a much better salary."

David took her back to her flat in a taxi. In a way, the evening had been a celebration of her promotion, and it didn't seem decent to take a highly competent sub. home on a bus. In the flat, Nadia came out in her dressing gown to make sure they weren't burglars, wished David good evening, and retired tactfully to her bed-sitting room. In the sitting-room, David took Margaret in his arms and kissed her half despairingly. She pressed against

him as of old, and gave him her mouth. She was very fond of him, but privately she thought this craze of his for journalism and T.V. absurd when he had a safe job and a good income waiting for him as a solicitor. He drew her across to a chesterfield, sat beside her with an arm round her, and said with mild bitterness:

"I don't seem even to be as good as a girl. You're a sub. On the *Daily Harvest* there's a girl called Maud Winkworth who's a foreign correspondent. She flies all over the world, to the most dangerous spots, and sends back damned good despatches, or whatever they're called."

"Stories', darling."

"All right, stories. And not only does she write her good stories, but she seems capable of looking after herself in the wilds without coming to any harm."

"I don't suppose Maud will ever see eighteen again, so she has a lifetime of experience, and it would be very short-sighted for even wild people to kill off a correspondent of the *Daily Harvest*. The publicity would be very bad for them. The *Harvest* would see to that."

David stood up regretfully.

"I must go, because it's time you were in bed, sweetie," he told her. "Thank you for coming out with me. I love you to come out with me, because I love you. And I'll remember all your good advice. You were rather fierce, and very ruthless, but no doubt it was good for me. If it interests you, I shall still go my mad way. I've burned my boats now."

When he had gone, Margaret sighed. David seemed to her like a child playing with a loaded pistol. He hadn't the least idea of what he was doing, or how to go about it.

She switched off the sitting-room light, went into her room, undressed, and got into bed. Once in bed she shrugged her white shoulders.

"I did my best for David, even if I did seem ruthless," she murmured, "but I'm afraid he's going to be very dis-

appointed, which is sad, because I love him too. Still, his father's well-off, and he can always fall back on his father. But if he fails in his ambition, he'll feel very bitter, and I don't want him to feel bitter, because he's so attractive as he is."

David went home and slept the dreamless sleep of the young. In the morning he had entirely recovered his natural buoyancy. He decided when he was shaving, because to a man shaving is an entirely automatic process, which leaves the mind free to wander at will:

"I'll do what Shawburn and Margaret said. I'll try to write articles for the Features Editor. If nothing comes of them, I'll try for a job on a paper, even if I come down to the *Clumpington Gazette*. I could afford to stay on it six months or so, if I could get on it, because my allowance goes on for a year. After my *Clumpington Gazette* experience, I ought to be able to find a job on a London daily."

That night, on his return home, he sat down at the desk *cum* dressing table, and tried to find a subject for an article. He had bought three daily papers and two evening ones, read all the articles, and counted the number of words in each. But the subjects gave him little help. They all reflected in some way or other the news of the moment, and were obviously written, as Peter Waterleigh had said, by members of the staff. To cut through the cloud of staff writers seemed almost impossible. At the end of a week he decided.

"The only thing to do is to write about a subject I know backwards, and one which these staff writers don't know backwards. Well, what subject do I know backwards?"

It was some days before he could make up his mind. Then, in the strange way these things happen he had the idea of The Greens. The Greens were not vegetables, but a family consisting of father, mother, a son and a daughter. The Greens were, in fact his own family in disguise. He decided to call the article: "Meet The

Greens." In it he set out the eternal conflict between the young generation and the old. He did not take sides; he was perfectly impartial, assigning blame to neither generation, attributing the conflict entirely to Nature. He sketched the armed neutrality between Penny and Moira, the cold war between himself and his father, and the further conflict between his father and mother, his mother taking David's side, and his father Penny's. He came to no conclusion; it was purely what the Army calls an appreciation of the situation in the average family.

David wrote this ten times, streamlining it every time, and omitting every unnecessary word. When it was done, it contained exactly the number of words used by the *Daily Harvest* in articles. During his next session at his secretarial school he typed it, making a carbon copy. This was necessary, because he had no typewriter of his own. He typed also a letter to the Features Editor of the *Daily Harvest*, explaining that this article would be of interest to every family or almost every family, and posted it. When he had slipped the envelope into a pillar box, he felt relaxed and content. He looked upon the article as a sign. If it was accepted he was on the right lines. If it wasn't, he would have to revise his ideas, and begin all over again.

For a week he heard nothing, nor did he expect to. This didn't matter, because the article was not topical; or conversely, it was always topical. Finally it came into the hands of the Features Editor, who read it, and re-lapsed into thought.

"This," he decided "contains an Idea," for, naturally, he spoke the same language as Bill Shawburn. "God knows who David Heysham is, but although the job's amateurish in a way, he knows what he wants to say, and says it. The situation he describes must exist in thousands of families to-day; dammit, it existed in mine. I think it's worth using when someone's gone over it and tuned it up. I shall buy it."

Consequently, David received a letter offering him ten

guineas for his article, which he accepted with joy. A week later he saw the article in print. It had been edited a good deal, but his argument and conclusions were not destroyed. He cut the article out of the paper, for it was his first-born, and placed it carefully in his desk-dressing table.

In the middle of the morning, a telephone call came to him from Roger, who seemed almost bursting with rage.

"I read your article in the *Daily Harvest* this morning," he began without any preliminary, "and I think it's perfectly disgraceful. How dared you write it?"

"But why is it disgraceful?" David asked mildly. "It's just what's called a psychological article, discussing family relationships."

"It's disgraceful because you're criticizing your own family in print. Anyone who knows us will realize who these so-called Greens are meant to be. Redmondhurst, who travels in my carriage read, and looked across at me and sniggered.

"'David seems to have written up you, and Moina, and his sister and himself, old boy,' he said. Of course, he knows you've refused to be a solicitor, and all the family trouble it's caused. That's gone all round the village. If you weren't my son, I'd bring an action against you for libel. You ought to be damned well ashamed of yourself."

"I can't see why anyone should connect us with the Greens, father. There must be thousands of families like the Greens."

"Then you're a perfect damned fool," Roger snapped, and rang off.

Ten minutes later, Margaret came through.

"Hullo David," she said. "I just wanted to congratulate you on your article in the *Harvest*. I thought it was pretty good."

"It's been rather mucked over in the office," David answered sadly, for the beginner is sensitive to sub-

editing. "For instance they've made me use sentences like: 'And should'. Of course, it isn't a sentence. A sentence needs a verb. And they made me write 'face up to', instead of 'face'. How does one face 'up to' anything?"

"People say 'face up to' nowadays. Anyway, don't be depressed. It's a great thing to get your first article into the *Harvest*. Other editors will notice it. I'm so glad. Good-bye."

A day later, three letters appeared in the *Harvest* on the subject of David's article. One, from an indignant father, blasted him to pieces; one, from a young man agreed with him in detail. One from a Very Good Girl Indeed, reproached him, and said that the writer would never dream of disagreeing with Maddy, who obviously knew best about everything. On the following day there were two more letters, one for David and one against. Mr. Fastnet, who read the *Harvest*, stopped David outside his room that morning, and smiled.

"Congratulations on getting into the *Harvest*, David," he said. "I doubt if your father will be very pleased with your article, but, between ourselves, I thought there was a good deal in what you wrote. Anyway, good luck."

There were also a good many letters addressed to David himself, in care of the *Harvest*. Many of them were abusive, many were sympathetic. All this was put lost on the Features Editor, who in some mysterious way discovered the telephone number of David's flatlet house, where Mrs. Forbes, greatly impressed by this great man's ringing, did not scruple to reveal David's office number. Consequently, David heard the Features Editor say curtly:

"Good morning, Mr. Heysham. The Greens seem to have caught on a bit, judging from the correspondence. Have you any more ideas for Greens articles, because, if so I'd like to see them. But make it snappy, or the public will have forgotten your Greens."

"Thank you very much," David replied almost breath-

lessly. "I have more ideas. I'll do another article to-night, and let you have it to-morrow."

"That's the stuff. Good-bye."

Margaret had a typewriter of her own. David called her and asked if he could borrow it that night, explaining why he wanted it. She seemed quite excited by his prospects and said of course he could borrow it; and so, that night, the second article about the Greens was born. David did not care what his father would say. This was the beginning of his career, and nothing and no one must interfere with it.

In the end, the Greens articles developed into a series. The News Editor said that David had the popular touch, and increased his payments. In course of time, a T.V. producer rang up and said he thought the Greens might make a T.V. series, and would David write a couple in the form of short stories. These, if approved, would be turned into T.V. scripts by technical writers at T.V. H.Q. David complied, and the Greens became a T.V. series. He had chiefly by luck, made a reputation in a few months.

However, there is a powder in most jam, a fly in most amber. The week-end at Wenton after the appearance of David's first article displayed almost frightening qualities. Roger remained silent all through dinner on the Friday night, and even Moira, coming into David's bedroom before dinner, with the saddest of expressions, asked pathetically:

"Darling, how *could* you have let that article be published? Your father's perfectly livid, and I'm very distressed. Of course, it's all over the village, and everybody's talking about it, which makes things very uncomfortable for me. Naturally, they all believe the article was about us, and they're delighted. Even Mrs. Stole stopped me in the street, and said she was sorry our family life was so tragic, and would I like the Vicar to speak to you? I said there was nothing wrong with our family life, and

that the Vicar needn't trouble to speak to you, but she didn't believe me. I could tell that from her face."

"My dear Mummy, one really can't take the village imbecility into consideration when one has one's way to make, and the article's no more about us than any other similar family, as I told Daddy when he rang me at the office in a foul temper. And I'm afraid there are going to be more articles about the Greens, because the idea's caught on, and I can't throw away what I hope is my career on account of Mrs. Stole, and a few more idiot Wenton females."

It was Penny who really shook him. She cornered him in a corridor, and said cynically:

"I assure you Mr. Heysham, the celebrated writer's torn it in a big way. The other models at my place told me they recognized me at once as Harry Green's sister, and did Daddy really spoil me that much, and were Mummy and I really at daggers drawn? I told them I couldn't be responsible for the daftness of my crazy brother, and that there was no likeness between the Greens and us. They didn't believe a word I said, and I shall probably be known for the rest of my life as Hilda Green. What a charming prospect!"

David, who, as an ex-soldier, knew that the best defence is attack, or so the Army had told him, put a brazen face on this assault, and told Penny:

"You're not in the least like Hilda. She was a *nice* girl, and loved her brother. Anyway, the Greens are going on, so you'll have to put up with them. If you make good as a model, I may be known as Penny Heysham's brother, and then we shall break even."

After dinner, Roger asked David into his study, and became very bitter. He called David an ungrateful boor, and said that even Harton hadn't been able to turn him into a gentleman; that he had libelled his parent and sister in print, and that his mother would never be able to hold up her head in Wenton again.

David replied that all this was no sense, that he

couldn't run his life according to the prejudices of Wenton, and that he proposed to return to London in the morning, seeing the way his family treated him.

Accordingly, after breakfast, David left. He said good-bye to Moira, but not to Roger. Roger, in David's opinion, had said unforgivable things. His good-bye to Penny was slightly cold. He had not forgotten her complaint of the previous evening. As his train came slowly into Marylebone Station, and he smelt the familiar smell, and savoured the familiar atmosphere of London, he smiled. What were Wenton and its petty inhibitions to him? His future lay in London, and, if he played his cards properly, the sky was the limit.

Roger, who was silent and hostile, departed to play golf. Penny coming down late to breakfast, for she was not dated with Spike till half past eleven, saw that Moira had been crying, and made a slightly astringent comment.

"If you're crying over David, Mummy, he isn't worth crying about. He's made a laughing stock of all of us, and I think he's frightful. Even my little playmates at Aubrey Rhodes's geyed me about that daft article of his in the *Daily Harvest*. I really don't know who David thinks he is. He's let us all down, if you ask me."

Penny then nourished herself on toast and tea and marmalade, and, at the sound of Spike's car drawing up outside, grabbed her coat and head scarf, and fled the house of doom. Moira was left alone. She cried a little more, and then bathed her eyelids, for it was necessary to go and shop in the village. There the usual tabbies congregated, and each had some comment to make on David's article. The comment usually took the form of:

"Of course, it's very clever of him to get into the papers, but . . . It must be rather trying for you, dear. What did his father say? I should think Mr. Heysham would be rather cross. I'm sure David didn't mean any harm, but . . . It must be very embarrassing for you, dear."

All this Moira laughed off. She said she felt rather proud of David's success, seeing that he wanted above all things to earn his living in journalism. She was unable to detect any resemblance to any one in the mythical Green family.

When she had started for home, one tabby would say to another:

"Of course she had to seem indifferent, dear, but I could see she was very upset. These Greens are exactly like the Heyshams, and there's no getting away from it, say what she may. If I were she, I should be furious."

That evening, in the sitting-room after dinner, Roger made his only reference to David. He said to Moira:

"I've given David my word in writing that he shall have his allowance for a year after he's twenty-one, and I shall keep my word, but that's all. I suppose after this preposterous article has been published, there's no hope of his changing his mind about the law. He probably sees himself as another Arnold Bennett." The late Mr. Bennett was the most recent author with whom Roger was familiar. "No doubt David will go on as he's going, if this rag he writes for encourages him, and expect to make his fortune. I hope he does, for all our sakes, because, when his allowance runs out, he'll be in the gutter otherwise."

"I don't see why you should be so hard on him," Moira countered. "Youth's the period for indiscretions, assuming that he has been indiscreet."

"At his age I should never have dared to commit indiscretions in connection with my family, dear, but then it was different in those days. Even a young man had a sense of responsibility. Now, of course, they have none. You can't say that I'm complaining without cause. You can see that even Penny's annoyed."

Moira said good night, and went sadly up to bed, leaving Roger with a final whisky and soda to soothe his feelings. She felt miserably alone. Penny was siding with her father, and David had shaken the dust of Wenton

from off his feet. She wished he hadn't invented the Greens, who were so like the Heyshams, but she sympathized with David for trying to strike out on his own. And now, with David gone, and not likely to return for a long time, with Roger and Penny against her, she felt entirely deserted by her family.

Then she dismissed the family from her mind, and looked forward to lunching with Charles in Dalesbridge on the following Wednesday. After the gap of Christmas, they had resumed their association as happily as though Christmas had never intervened. Charles had now become a necessity to her. She refused to think of the inevitable day when his work in the cathedral would end, and he would go away. She felt that Charles would comfort her over David's article, and the family stress which had followed it. Charles had a wide outlook on life, and would see the whole affair in its proper proportion.

She said a little prayer for Charles, after her usual prayers for her family, and, feeling comforted, shut her eyes, and went to sleep. For once she needed no sleeping tablets, being emotionally exhausted, and did not even hear Roger when he came to bed.

Chapter Nine

SPRING came with May, and Penny, as spring-like as the season at her age, arrayed herself in a new spring dress to dine with Francis at his studio. She looked forward to the dinner very much, because, as she told herself, Francis did something to her. John alas, lacked this capacity. He was very charming, very admiring, but he could never thrill her. Their association had run its inevitable course. There had been the routine love-making in the back seats of John's Bentley one spring evening, after he had driven her out into the country for dinner at a riverside hotel, and more routine love-making in a flat he had taken over from a brother officer who was destined for overseas; but although she enjoyed John's love-making up to a point, she would have traded it all for Francis merely to pass his hand over her hair, and tell her it was the most wonderful colour in the world.

She took a taxi to Chelsea, not wishing her new spring dress to be defiled by a bus or tube, and rang the bell of Francis's flat with as much emotion as if it had been the first time she had dined with him. Francis opened the door, looking very delectable in a new grey flannel suit, ushered her in, shut the door, led her into the studio, and kissed her. She leaned her head back, and shut her eyes, so as to miss nothing of the kiss. Then she opened her eyes, and gazed around in some astonishment.

"It's all different," she said, half admiringly, half sadly, for though she admired she felt faintly grieved that the studio was not the same as it had always been.

"True, there are a few improvements," Francis said complacently. "You see, darling, I'm making a fair amount of money these days, and I felt one's surround-

ings should match one's income. So I've turned the gallery into a dining place—pray note the teak garden furniture, which has a rather nice colour, and one makes the chairs fit under the table when one isn't using them, so as to give more room. And then the walls and ceiling have been painted, and there's a new carpet, and new covers on the divan and the arm-chairs. I only need the bit under the north light to work in, and the floor of that, as you can see, has a covering of linoleum, so that if I splash paint about it can be washed off. Don't say you dislike my poor efforts."

"It's terribly smart, but I rather regret the old, battered look."

"You have a lovely new dress which becomes you vastly, and I have a lovely new suit, which probably you haven't even noticed. We ought to have surroundings to match our personal splendour. Well, we've got them."

Francis then served her tomato soup, lobster salad, and ice cream, with a delicious white wine. They made coffee, and sat drinking it and smoking cigarettes. Then the urge for confession afflicted Penny, "since she really loved Francis, so she asked:

"Francis, do you ever deceive me with other girls?"

"But of course," Francis answered politely. "How seldom I see you, and how frequent is the desire for female companionship."

"It's perfectly loathsome of you, but it may be just as well, because I deceive you with another man. I ought to be spanked for it, but there it is."

"If confession would help, I'm all attention," Francis told her, and so she described her goings on with John.

"I adore you, as you know, heaven help me seeing that you go with other girls, but I don't love John a bit. However, he has that social lacquer which is such a feature of the 120th. Rifles, and would bore me stiff if I saw much of it at a time, and he takes me to the Délices, and I borrow dresses from the head *vendeuse*, and it's all

good for trade. Several ladies of high degree have asked me in the little girls' room where I got my marvellous dress, but I don't suppose they can afford our prices. However, it's all good publicity."

"You are at an age when you need variety," Francis explained. "You couldn't be expected to stick to one man. You're experimenting, which is only natural. One day you'll make up your mind, and then some lucky man will be in heaven for the rest of his life."

"Do you love your other girls as much as you love me, Francis?"

"Of course I don't, darling. They're just inferior substitutes and whenever I make love to them, I always pretend I'm making love to you."

"You're the most gifted liar I ever met, Francis, but thank you for your pretty lies, 'cos you wouldn't bother to tell them if you didn't want me. And now, I think I should like to be kissed if it isn't too much trouble, because I shall have to go home soon to my little meek divan, and one would like some memories to take with one."

So Francis provided her with memories until she sighed, and said:

"Really, Francis, you make love more marvellously than any man I ever knew. I shouldn't think there's any other man like you in the world."

"The credit's all yours," Francis answered, stroking the hair he loved with gentle fingers. "I couldn't make love to any other girl as I make love to you, because she wouldn't be You, see?"

"I hate to tell you that John's taking me to the Délices to dine this week."

"What does it matter if he is, seeing you say you don't love him a bit?"

"I'm sure I don't know, but after this evening I rather wish he wasn't. You see, I shall have to let him kiss me good night."

"Naturally. It would be very discourteous of you if you didn't, after his good dinner."

Penny got up, and began to comb her hair, and do her face in front of Francis's long wall mirror with the yellow curtains half draping it.

"Sometimes I could kill you," she confessed. "You don't seem to care a damn what other men do to me. I suppose it's on 'account of your fatal fascination for me. You know perfectly well that no other man could make me go all gooey as you do, curse you."

"For that pretty speech I'll take you home in a taxi," Francis promised.

Even as she had foretold, Penny dined with John two nights later. He took her to the Délices, because it was a tradition with them now, and in any case, where better could he have taken her? It was part of such history as they had made together, and by this time the head waiter had become positively grandfatherly. When eleven o'clock came, John said:

"Penny, darling, you'll stay for supper, won't you. All the wicked actresses will be coming on from the theatres where they score their triumphs, and I shall be able to see how much nicer you are than any of them."

"I dare say I may be. All successful wicked actresses are about a hundred years old. All right, John, I'll stay if you like, though I shall look bug-eyed in the morning for want of sleep, and then the head *vendeuse* will tear off a strip, as you bloodthirsty soldiers say."

Truly enough, in about half an hour the wicked actresses began to sway in, accompanied by their male victims. Penny glanced around at them with faint superciliousness. She had the magic of youth, which they had long left behind, and a better dress than their dresses, thanks to the influence of the excellent Miss Rose. And then Penny perceived two men sitting together at a corner table, quietly taking stock of the female clients. They were both middle-aged, one of them obviously an

American. He had hair greying at the temples, a well developed waist-line, and was smoking a vast cigar. Penny thought how mean it was of them to sup together, when each might be entertaining some deserving girl. Then she noticed that the American was watching her closely, and gave him a cold stare for his pains. John also noticed him, and treated him to the glassy eye of the 120th. when something annoys them.

The American, not in the least disturbed, continued to watch. Finally he said something to his companion, who nodded. The American rose, proceeded across the crowded restaurant with a suggestion of the dignity of a ship in full sail, and paused in front of Penny and John. He said to Penny:

"Good evening, ma'am. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Mr. Carl Schutzritter, President of Summit Pictures, Inc. I'd like to make you a proposition, if you've no objection." He then glanced at John, and added:

"Excuse the interruption, sir, but this is a matter of importance, and may be greatly to the lady's advantage."

Penny gave him a false smile, and answered:

"Good evening, Mr. Schutzritter. I am Miss Penelope Heysham," and then, turning to John:

"The Hon. John Lanyon, Mr. Schutzritter." John said, with the icy technique the 120th. employ when dealing with a filthy bounder:

"Good evening, Mr. Schutzritter. Pray sit down and take some coffee and brandy with me."

"Why, that's real nice of you, Mr. Lanyon," Mr. Schutzritter told John, seeming as happy as though he had been welcomed with open arms. "I only made England by air this morning. This is quite a dandy place, and the eats are swell."

The waiter, to whom John had signed, placed coffee and brandy before Mr. Schutzritter, who took a gulp of brandy, leaned both elbows on the table, and gazed into Penny's face with what John considered vile effrontery.

"It's like this, Miss Heysham," he began. "I'm here to arrange for a picture to be made in Britain by my organization, Summit Pictures, Inc. The picture we're making is called *Delilah Comes To Stay*, and so far we haven't been able to pick out the right girl for the lead part. I wouldn't like you to get wrong ideas about the story because the heroine's called Delilah. That's symbolical, I guess. Delilah's not her real name. The girl in the story comes to be a Delilah against her will, quite by chance as you might say. Well, it's happened before, and it'll happen again, that a film director with an important pitcher to cast has combed Hollywood to find the right star, and failed, and then walked into some Ritzy hash-joint like this, and seen just the type he's looking for. I figure you're just the type I'm looking for, and that's why I'm making the proposition that you should star in this picture."

"But I'm not an actress, Mr. Schutzritter. I don't know the first thing about acting."

Mr. Schutzritter waved his cigar in a gesture of contempt.

"Don't let that worry you, honey. The executive who directs the picture will take care of the acting. Which of all the floozies you'd call film stars can act anyway? My point is you look right for this girl—in the script she's an innocent girl, but the male star, who's got a mind like a sink, like all men, I guess, misunderstands her, but of course it all comes right in the end. And I can offer you a gilt-edged contract. If you make good in this picture, as I guess you will, because the director will take care of that, why, you've got a career in motion pictures before you stretching from here to hell and gone. I'd like you to come around to our orfuss in Mayfair to-morrow and discuss terms, if you will."

"I don't know if I can. I shall be at work. I model for Aubrey Rhodes, the *grand couturier*, of Grosvenor Street."

"Aw, shucks," Mr. Schutzritter answered contemptu-

ously, with another wave of his cigar which consigned Aubrey and all his works to the depths of the Pit. "With us you'll be making more money in a week than you will with this guy in a year. Besides, you owe it to the public, Miss Heysham, to make this very lovely pitcher, which has more moral uplift to the foot of film than any pitcher I can remember."

Penny gazed rather helplessly at John, who said in the well-known accent of the 120th.:

"If you propose to go into this offer, Penny, you should do it through a theatrical agent. I happen to know one—he's connected with the best theatrical agents in London, Geoffrey Alleyn, who used to be in my Regiment while he did his military service. He had a commission, of course. The theatre and the movie racket are full of pitfalls if you don't know the ropes. You'd better let me ring Geoffrey to-morrow, and he can get in touch with Mr. Schutzritter, if he'll give me his office address and telephone number, and then Geoffrey can make an appointment for you and him."

"Thanks a lot, John. I think that would be the best way. I don't suppose anything will come of all this; I hope Geoffrey won't mind."

"Of course he won't mind. If anything comes of Mr.—ah.—Schutzritter's proposal, Geoffrey will charge his commission."

Seeing that John was adamant, and Penny entirely guided by him in this matter, Mr. Schutzritter took out the very latest idea in automatic pencils, and wrote his name, office address and telephone number on a scrap of paper torn from an envelope. John replied with Geoffrey's written on a menu card. Mr. Schutzritter said ominously:

"I aim to fly back to the United States the day after to-morrow, so I guess your Mr. Alleyn will need to hustle. I want to have the deal all tied up before I leave."

"You'll find Mr. Alleyn very capable," John assured him coldly.

"And I'd like your address too, please, Miss Heysham, just to be on the safe side."

Penny glanced at John, who seemed to have taken charge of the proceedings, and he told her:

"You may as well give it to him, if it keeps him happy. The address won't make any difference. It's all up to Geoffrey."

Mr. Schutzritter made his farewells, not quite so exuberant as he had been when introducing himself. Never in his life had he found a girl so unaffected by a startling film offer. When he had gone, Penny asked John:

"Is he serious, or is he drunk, or is he in the white slave traffic, do you think?"

"He's probably serious, but the likes of Mr. Schutzritter always shoot off their mouths, as he would say. Anyway, Geoffrey will soon sort him out."

They danced till the restaurant shut, and then John drove Penny home, and kissed her good night rather forlornly. To him it seemed that she might be going out of his life for ever, which would be too bad. Penny slept the sleep of the young, and before she got up in the morning, the telephone bell rang. She fled in her night-dress to answer it so that Jacinth should not be disturbed. A man's voice said:

"This is Geoffrey Alleyn. Can I speak to Miss Heysham, please?"

"Good morning, Mr. Alleyn. This is Miss Heysham speaking."

"Sorry to disturb you so early, Miss Heysham, but John rang me at about three a.m. this morning, for which I duly thanked him, and told me about the Schutzritter offer. I'll fix an interview at his office for this afternoon, as Schutzritter leaves for the States to-morrow. I expect you could get time off, couldn't you? Then, if terms are satisfactory, we could sign the contract then and there."

"Thank you, Mr. Alleyn. I'll get off somehow. By the way, I'm only eighteen, so I suppose I'm a minor. My

father, who's a solicitor has always explained to me the limitations of minors. Could I sign the contract all on my own?"

"Yes, because it's a contract for your benefit. If later it turned out not to be for your benefit, as we supposed, you could, being a minor, repudiate it. You've all to gain, and nothing to lose. If you give me your office number, I'll call you back later this morning."

Penny gave it to him, and then asked wistfully:

"Should I earn a lot of money? I should like a lot of money very much. It gives one an independent feeling."

"Seeing that, apparently, you're the only girl in the world, who looks the part, according to Mr. Schutzritter, we ought to be able to screw him up to quite a figure. Money's nothing to these big film companies. Thank you, Miss Heysham. Good-bye."

Penny hung up, bathed, dressed, breakfasted, and went to work. She said nothing to Jacinth about Mr. Schutzritter, because the whole thing seemed to her like a dream. But, at eleven a.m. a call came for her *chez* Aubrey Rhodes, to the annoyance of Miss Rose, who deprecated private calls in working hours. The caller was Geoffrey, who said:

"I've fixed our interview for two-thirty. Will that be all right?"

"Yes, thank you. I shall be torn to bits by the *héraut* *vendeuse*, but they won't sack me for wanting two hours off."

"Good. I'll be seeing you, Miss Heysham. Good-bye."

Penny arrived at the offices of Summit Pictures, Inc. in a very good tailored suit, and her fox-furs. Geoffrey, whom she had never seen before, introduced himself in the waiting room. They were then ushered into a very ornate office, where sat Mr. Schutzritter, smoking what seemed to be an even larger cigar than the one of the evening before, supported by one of his yes-men. Mr. Schutzritter rose, shook hands warmly with Penny, and not so warmly with Geoffrey, and said:

"Good afternoon, Miss Heysham. Good afternoon, Mr. Alleyn. Well, I guess here are two copies of the contract, so that you can both read them at once, and save time."

Penny sat down and studied the first contract she had ever known. When she saw that the salary mentioned was £500 a week, her poor heart leapt. Then to her horror, Geoffrey commented:

"In my view, the salary isn't enough. Here you have the only girl suitable for playing lead in this picture, and all you offer her is five hundred a week. I suggest at least seven hundred and fifty, to be increased to a thousand a week if she makes a second picture."

"She has no experience, and one always has to buy experience, Mr. Alleyn. We might make it seven hundred and fifty a week for her second picture, if she makes a second picture."

"Nothing doing, Mr. Schutzritter. She's in a unique position, and she wants seven hundred and fifty a week."

Penny gazed at Geoffrey with pathetic eyes. As far as she could see, he was throwing away a fortune on her account. Mr. Schutzritter looked at his wrist watch, and asked the yes-man:

"What time's Spielhaus scheduled to meet me this afternoon, Earl?"

"At a quarter after three, Mr. Schutzritter."

"Then I haven't time to argue," Mr. Schutzritter, who would have gone to a thousand pounds a week if pressed, as Geoffrey had a shrewd idea, replied. "Take these contracts out and get 'five hundred' altered to 'seven hundred' and fifty, Earl."

"And you'd better put in a clause that the picture shall be made in England," Geoffrey added. "You said so last night, so my friend Mr. Lanyon told me, but we'd like it in the contract."

"Aw shucks!" Mr. Schutzritter answered impatiently. "Can't you take a guy's word for anything? Have the clause put in, Earl, and make it snappy. I don't see

myself getting any sleep to-night the way things are going. Everyone in England's as slow as molasses in January."

The contracts came back, Penny and Mr. Schutzritter signed them, and Mr. Schutzritter said good-bye rather hastily, adding:

"You'll be hearing from my organization very shortly, Miss Heysham. I'm sure this is going to be a very lovely pitcher," and turned back immediately to his yes-man. Outside, Geoffrey said to Penny:

"Well, congratulations. It does happen sometimes that a big shot in pictures sees a girl somewhere, and decides she's just the type he's looking for. You may as well cash in on Mr. Schutzritter's vanity."

"I nearly fainted when you asked for more than five hundred pounds a week, Mr. Alleyn."

"Pure bluff. I knew he'd offer less than he was prepared to pay. I didn't stand to lose anything, because I could always have gone back to the five hundred. That's what agents are for."

He took Penny back to Grosvenor Street, asking on the way for details of her work and life. In next day's *Daily Harvest* the film expert had a glowing account of Penny, her contract, her distinction as a model, and all the rest. This had been arranged by Summit Pictures, who, after all, were advertisers, aided by Geoffrey. Consequently, at mid-morning, Roger came through on the telephone to Penny at her place of work, and asked:

"In God's name, Penny, what's all this about your starring in a film, and why have I heard nothing about it?"

"Well, Daddy, the contract was only signed yesterday. The big boss saw me the night before, dining with a man at the Délices, and he concluded I looked just the girl for the job, and came over and said so. And I'm going to get seven hundred and fifty pounds a week, and as the picture's to be made in England I shan't be subjected to all the temptations of Hollywood."

"But you aren't of age. I should certainly have been consulted."

"The big noise is flying back to the States to-day, so there was no time. And anyway, my agent said I could sign a contract as long as it's to my advantage, which it is. And I do think you might congratulate me on being such a clever girl as to look just like the girl the big noise said he wanted."

"Of course I congratulate you, Penny, but it was a bit of a shock to read it in the paper before I'd heard a thing. I don't know what your mother will say."

"She'll probably be very pleased. If it had happened to her, she'd be on top of the world."

"Well, we'll be seeing you to-morrow," Roger ended, in a rather deflated manner, and rang off.

The morrow being Friday, Penny met her father at Marylebone Station. David still remained away from home. His Greens had now begun to appear on television, and the attitude of the locals in Wenton towards him was completely in reverse. They now congratulated Moira on her having such a clever son, and Janet Quantock invited her to watch the Greens feature on her set, as Roger had barred television from his home.

When Penny met Roger, he shook her hand, and smiled down at her fondly.

"You're quite wonderful," he said, as a young lover might have said, "and I do congratulate you. I'm afraid I sounded rather lukewarm yesterday, but I was a bit taken aback. Your mother's not quite so enthusiastic about your new career as I am. She said it seemed rather distressing for you to be kissed in the picture, as I suppose you will be, and have all the world gaping at you in cinemas. However, I pointed out to her that these things happen on the stage and screen, and that they mean nothing. They're just part of the action."

"Thank you, Daddy. I can't believe it all yet, but no doubt I shall get used to the idea."

That week-end, Penny was glad to escape with Spike,

because all the village rang her up to congratulate her. Spike, who knew her very well, merely grinned as he swung his car out of the Heysham's drive-in.

"Marilyn Monroe and the Lollobrigida, or whatever her name is, will have to look to their laurels now," he said. "By the way, how does one look to one's laurels? Have you any laurels? I haven't."

"You can't have taken much notice of me, Spike," Penny said sadly. "I'm by no means the same shape as Marilyn, nor as Jane Russell for that matter. The whole thing's daft, of course, and I don't intend to stay in the film racket, but it will be nice to make some money for once. I shall store it up for my old age, and go back to modelling."

"But think of the thrill of being made love to by the male star, with whom all the girls in the audience will be in love, and how they'll envy you!"

"The love-making will all be phoney. And you should talk about the male star's love-making, anyway. You've made love to me enough, and whatever else one might say about it, your love-making isn't phoney."

"Thank you so much for those kind words, darling. We must make love some more to-day and to-morrow, in case you never have time for it again. I understand filming's damned hard work."

"So's modelling. I'm used to hard work. I've always been a slave, ever since I got my first job."

"Slavery must be good for you. You look more divine than ever to-day. It must be the tonic of success."

"You wait till I *am* a success before you start talking. However, I don't need to know how to act. I just do whatever the director tells me, and he sees I do it properly or improperly, according to what he wants."

It seemed to Penny a delightful change from Mr. Schutzritter and all his works to be driven where she willed by Spike, and given luncheon in Oxford as usual, and dinner at the Lamb's Head in Dalesbridge. She wasn't in love with him, nor, probably, was he with her.

but they suited one another physically, and had a certain number of other things in common. Besides, Spike was a crack automobile engineer, and, even at her young age, Penny respected people who did things for their living, and were competent. The only man she came near to loving was Francis, because he had infinite charm and understanding, and she could tell him things she could never have told Spike. Poor John was merely the brother of Lois Sandcroft who spent money with Aubrey Rhodes, Ltd., and provided a show window at the Délices where a beautiful model could demonstrate the beauty of Aubrey Rhodes gowns. Penny had no time whatever for a young Regular Army officer who was the produce of the peerage. Everything had been handed to John on a plate since his birth; and Penny considered him rather a sissy, in spite of his having been shot up in Malaya.

On the Monday, Aubrey Rhodes congratulated her in person. This pleased her, because Moira had been a trifle lukewarm about her daughter's film career. She implied, without saying so, that for a well brought up girl to be kissed and fondled for the vulgar public to look at was not quite the sort of thing of which she approved. Aubrey, however, was enthusiastic.

"I wish you the best of luck, Miss Heysham," he said warmly. "You've done good work here, and I'm sure you'll do good work in films. We shall miss you in Grosvenor Street. I suppose you're all set on the road to fame, but if ever you want to come back when you've finished this film, I shall be delighted to have you. I'm afraid that's rather a vain hope on my part."

"I don't think so, Mr. Rhodes. One film part will be quite enough for me. After that I'd rather continue modelling. I don't suppose I shall be of the slightest use in films. It's just the vanity of this Mr. Schutzritter, who thinks he can spot the ideal girl for a part by looking across a restaurant. But I may as well cash in on him."

David rang up from his office full of congratulations.

"The young Heyshams are certainly going places," he said, "and it's odd that both you and I should be mixed up in different forms of drama, you in films, and I in television. Are they paying you decently, if it isn't a rude question?"

"Seven hundred and fifty a week. If the film takes six weeks, that will be going on for five thousand, less agent's commission. But I don't expect to continue in films. I can always come back here; the boss told me so just now. All I want is a nest egg, so's I don't have to marry the first man who asks me, when my looks are fading, and I'm on the point of becoming a hag."

"Nice work," David commented admiringly. "Well. tons of luck. I'll be there at the first showing of the film, if it kills me."

Alas, when Penny started in her star part, the reality almost beat her to the ground. She had to leave home by crack of dawn to be at Upperton, where the film studios were, in time for her make-up and to change before filming began. The glare of lights hurt her eyes, and the endless repetition of a scene until the director felt satisfied nearly drove her mad. Nor did she appreciate particularly the leading man, who was a good deal older than she, though made up to look like a handsome young lover. Perhaps his fans would have been surprised could they have seen him in real life. At last, when she could have cried from frustration, Francis rang her at home in the evening, and asked her to lunch and dine at the studio on the following Sunday, which, he supposed, was her only free day. He had already telephoned his good wishes weeks before, and then there had been silence, his silence seeming to Penny one more trial in her sorely tried life.

"Thank you, darling, but I thought you'd forgotten all about me," she answered in mild reproach. "It would probably save my tottering reason to talk to someone intelligent. You've no idea of the mental barrenness of

these filmers. One would think that nothing existed outside films. Probably it doesn't for them. If it did, they'd never be filmers. I doubt if I shall ever go to pictures, as it's called, again. I've seen too much of the inside."

"Elephants never forget," replied Francis, who did not resemble an elephant in the least, being tall and reasonably slim. "It's just that I've been snowed under with work, and I imagined you were too. But now things are a little easier with me, and I suppose you've become resigned to your fate. Would you like to lunch at our restaurant round the corner, and then come back here and dine?"

"No!" Penny said passionately. "All I want is peace. Your studio's the most peaceful place I know, and if I want to, you'll let me lie on your divan and shut my eyes, and not speak for an hour. Not that I shall want not to speak for an hour. I want to hear all about what you're doing, and then moan about my own sufferings. Really, Francis, I've come to the conclusion that, although I'm making good money, money isn't everything. I was far happier modelling for my ten pounds a week, and a few fees for photographic sittings on the side."

"I've always noticed that the rich say money isn't everything, and for the moment you must be rich. I'm not doing too badly myself, but I simply love putting my prices up. Why should one do a thing for a shilling when one can get eighteenpence for it?"

"Why indeed? All right, Francis, I'll be along at twelve-thirty on Sunday for a drink before luncheon, and thank you very much."

Penny arrived punctually at Francis's studio on the Sunday, wearing a little summer dress as light as a breath. She stood for a moment, before ringing, outside the green door of the studio, and thought how much more than home the studio and its green door meant to her.

"Odd," Penny commented to herself, and rang the

bell. Francis opened the door, blessed her with a smile, shut the door after her, and kissed her tenderly. There was this difference between the kisses of Francis and those of Spike; Spike kissed her for the mutual thrill, but Francis kissed her as though he loved her, and thought her wonderful. She had never bothered to analyse poor John's kisses, because they didn't count at all. They were just something one washed off one's face before one went to bed.

Penny gazed around the studio, sighed with content, and said:

"It's just the same as ever. Promise you'll never alter it, Francis, or I'll never speak to you again."

"Apart from replacing things that wear out, I won't alter it. I rather like it myself."

He poured gin and tonic for Penny, and she sipped it as though it were the elixir of life. He thought she looked a little thinner, but perhaps that was his imagination. The young girl of the period was, after all, not made of sugar. They dinched on soup and cold chicken and salad, and after that Penny lay on the divan, with a cup of Francis's exquisite coffee in her hand, and poured out her sorrows.

"You don't know how fierce this job is, Francis. How would you like to be kissed by a man much older than yourself—well, in your case she'd be a woman, I s'pose—with his face covered in make-up, and do the kiss ten times, or twenty times, till the director's satisfied? And that goes for all the scenes, and we're not half-way through the damned film yet. And I wouldn't be surprised if my male star wears a *toupée*. That's my impression, anyway. And I get up with the lark to be at the studios on time, and when I go to bed I'm dead, but completely dead. What a life for a poor girl!"

"My heart bleeds for you, darling, but the young are very elastic. And you say you won't make another film, even if asked, and you'll go back to your dear Aubrey

Rhodes, who's never put a foot wrong as far as you're concerned. Besides, I love you very much, if that counts."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it did, darling. What work are you doing now? Show me please, because I'm interested."

Francis showed her a number of sketches, and she said gravely:

'You're pretty good, aren't you? And you keep on improving, as even I can see. You're really brilliant, Francis, not like me, just depending for my living on my face, and legs, and figure. And one day no one will want to look at either, and then I shall be out for the count.'

Francis had a desperate impulse to ask Penny to marry him, and be taken care of for ever, but he fought it back. It wouldn't be fair to ask a girl of nineteen, with perhaps a great film career in front of her, to tie herself down in marriage. He had better wait, little as he wanted to. So he took her in his arms, and kissed her, and she lay there hardly breathing. Tea time came, and then dinner, and they talked by fits and starts, because their thoughts seemed to communicate as easily as words. When he took her home, Penny flung herself into his arms, and said

"Thank you for my lovely day, Francis. I can bear anything now."

Chapter Ten

IT was May, the month sacred to women, and Moira prepared to take the bus for Dalesbridge, and lunch with Charles. So far they had lunched at his flat on most Wednesdays without being discovered, either by the bishop, or the dean, or any of the Wenton tabbies. Moira had known every foot of the road from Wenton to Dalesbridge for over twenty years, but on Wednesdays it seemed to her like the golden road to Samarkand. She had long come to the conclusion that, except for Charles, she could not have endured the indifference of Roger, his relationship with David, which now, fortunately seemed to be improving owing to David's success in journalism and television, though David still remained in London at week-ends; and the shock of Penny's becoming what seemed to be a film star.

Mrs. Innes met her with a smile as usual; she had long established a friendship with Mrs. Innes, who considered her a charming lady, and that whatever her relationship with Mr. Feltham might be was nothing to do with Mrs. Innes.

"If he'd got off with some fast little trout, I should have asked for my cards long ago," Mrs. Innes had reflected once. "It isn't so much what a person does as the way she does it. Give me good manners and damn what people do in their private lives."

Charles welcomed Moira as tenderly as ever, and she sat in a patch of sunlight sipping her pre-luncheon cocktail. And then, as they talked, a premonition of doom stole over her. Charles was the same, yet not the same. He loved her just as much, but he seemed somehow poised for flight, or change. She asked no questions,

preferring to wait, and see if her premonition were accurate. There was no need to rush upon her doom, if doom it was to be.

Mrs. Innes served her usual impeccable luncheon, and departed for the rest of the day. Moira poured coffee, and Charles gave her a cigarette. Then he sat opposite her, and the blow fell.

"I'm afraid we shan't be able to see one another for a bit, darling," he began. "My job at the cathedral's done, the bish. and the dean are very satisfied, and I'm off to Northumberland to supervise the restoration of a church there. It'll be a most interesting job, because it's a Norman church, and Dalesbridge Cathedral's practically an upstart compared with it. But, as you know, I have a flat in London, and we can meet there when I come down from Northumberland."

To her astonishment, Moira heard herself answering quite calmly:

"Yes, Charles. I'm terribly sorry, but I knew you'd have to go one day. And I shall love to see your flat in London."

She wanted to throw herself onto the chesterfield and sob her heart out, but she knew a woman must never cry over a man, because it embarrasses him hopelessly. She knew also that it would be impossible to see him in his London flat. For her to go to Dalesbridge once a week excited no comment. Most of the Winton tabbies did the same, for shopping purposes, and she had always been careful to make a few purchases in Dalesbridge so that she should have some parcels in case one or more tabbies shared the bus with her on the way home. But for her to go to London every Wednesday would be bound to excite comment, and she might even meet Roger on the train coming home. Besides, she doubted if Charles would wait for her in London, or not for long anyway. Charles must, obviously, have his London contacts, and in view of that a slightly dowdy woman from the country couldn't expect to hold his interest. Moira had long realized the difference between Penny's appearance and

hers since Penny worked for Aubrey Rhodes. Naturally, Penny wore country clothes in the country, but when she arrived home, and left on Monday mornings she looked to Moira incredibly smart and sophisticated. Probably she spent less on clothes than Moira, but the difference in the effect was marked.

She heard Charles saying:

"I shall miss you frightfully, darling; life won't be the same any more," and she heard herself answer:

"I shall miss you frightfully too, and life won't be the same for me any more either." Then she could not help adding:

"But it'll be worse for me than for you, because I shall be the one left behind, and it's always very sad to be the one left behind." The words of a song her father had sung when she was a child recurred to her. The words were by Sir Walter Scott, and the music by Arthur Sullivan:

"This morn 'tis merry June, I know,
The rose is budding fain,
But she shall bloom in winter's snow
Ere we two meet again . . .

"He turned his charger as he spake
Upon the river shore,
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
Said: 'Adieu for evermore,
My love, my love,
Adieu for evermore'."

"You won't be left behind, darling. I shall take your memory with me in my heart."

Moira looked at him and smiled.

"You'll keep it there for a while, because you're nice, and then you'll forget. Your life will go on, and your surroundings change, but I shall just stay Moira Heysham, of the village of Wenton, and nothing in my life will change, except that you won't be here any more."

"Moira, my sweet, you make me sound very unkind, but I don't mean to be unkind."

"You don't sound anything of the sort, Charles. You've never been unkind to me. I don't think you could be if you tried, because yours isn't an unkind nature. But obviously you need to go on with your career, and you'll meet other people, and you can't possibly remember me for ever. I shall remember you for ever, because you've given me such a lot at a time when I was very unhappy. You'll never understand how much you've given me, but I understand."

At the afternoon, she lay in his arms, until five o'clock came, and it was time for her to go. She washed away the traces of the very few tears she had shed in the bathroom she would never see again. Her eyes dwelled for a moment on Charles's shaving things and toilet equipment. It seemed very friendly to see these traces of him; and now she would never see them any more. She went back into the sitting-room, and he held her fur coat, and kissed her hair and her eyelids.

"Till we meet in London, and I can kiss you again," he told her, and she answered, knowing the answer to be vain:

"Yes, my dear, till we meet in London. Will you walk down to the bus with me for the one and only time? It doesn't matter if some Wenton woman sees us together now."

"I'd love to walk down to the bus with you, Moira my sweet."

They walked down together, saying little, and there in the bus queue Moira perceived Mrs. Stole, the wife of the vicar of Wenton. Mrs. Stole smiled, and Moira smiled back. Charles could not raise his hat, because he was hatless, and Moira did not introduce him. The bus drew up, and Moira followed Mrs. Stole inside it. The bus started, Charles waved his hand in farewell, and Moira waved back. Mrs. Stole, seated beside Moira, observed all this with deep interest.

Directly the bus had started, Mrs. Stole said:

"That was Mr. Feltham, the architect who's been superintending the renovation of the cathedral, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered Moira, wondering if Mrs. Stole knew Charles.

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Well, I've met him."

"I wonder if you could persuade him to come and look over our church?" Mrs. Stole went on, and her manner suggested:

"If you do, I won't say anything about having seen you with him." She continued:

"You see, we've found wood-worm in the oak beams of the roof, and the vicar's very worried. There's no money to pay for advice, and I thought if Mr. Feltham—that's his name, isn't it?—was a friend of yours you might ask him to give us advice. We only want to know how bad the damage is, and how much it would cost to put right."

"I'm afraid I couldn't ask Mr. Feltham to do that," Moira replied. "For one thing, I don't see why he should do it for nothing, and for another, he told me he's finished with the cathedral, and will be going north almost at once. I'm sorry, Mrs. Stole."

"I wonder how you come to know him?" Mrs. Stole inquired. "I've never seen him in the village, and no one seems to have any contact with him except the dean."

"I suppose the dean would. He's in charge of what I believe's called the fabric, isn't he? Why don't you ask the dean?"

"That wouldn't be any use. If the dean called him in he'd ask a fee."

Moira remained silent, and stared out of the windows of the bus. Evidently Mrs. Stole thought she was a sinner and might like to compound her sin by getting Charles to vet the village church for nothing. As she had no intention of doing anything of the kind, there was no

more to be said. When Moira got out of the bus, where Mrs. Stole would continue till the next stop, that lady said:

"Good-bye, dear. I'm so sorry you can't help us over Mr. Feltham." Moira knew then that soon it would be all over the village that she knew Charles. However, surely it was not a crime to know Charles?

She went into her house and changed for dinner. Roger returned, and there followed the usual routine of sherry. Over dinner he revived, and said contentedly:

"David seems to be getting on very well with this television stunt; several men have spoken to me about it. And he rang me to-day to tell me he's got a staff job on the *Daily Harvest*; not as a reporter, but as a writer. In view of that, he's decided definitely to give up the law. I suppose one can't blame him, but, candidly, I never thought anything would come of his writing. It seemed to me just an adolescent craze which would pass. Apparently it isn't."

"I always had far more confidence in David than you, Roger. He did well in the Army, and the Army has no time for duds."

"As it happens, you were right, Moira. However," Roger continued fondly, "he hasn't stepped out like Penny. I never dreamed I should ever be the father of a film star."

"I should say Penny's is the more precarious job of the two, Roger. She may never get another part after this one."

"You always had a down on Penny, my dear. I suppose it's the rivalry between two women, even if they're mother and daughter."

Moira did not retort:

"You always had a down on David, and I suppose it's the rivalry between two men, even if they're father and son." She had learned to take refuge in silence for the sake of peace. In the after dinner period, when they had drunk their coffee, Roger departed to his library to

work. Moira could not decide whether this habit was due to pressure of litigation, or boredom with her. He was still in the study when she went to bed, and she did not disturb him in order to say good night.

On the following evening, she knew from his manner that something had gone wrong. He did not reveal what the something was till coffee had been served in the sitting-room. Then he said at last:

"Stole came up to Town in my carriage this morning."

Moira could now guess what was wrong. Mrs. Stole had been talking to her husband about Moira and Charles, and the vicar had talked to Roger. However, she only answered:

"Did he travel first class? He usually goes third."

"Of course he travelled first class, or he wouldn't have been in my carriage," Roger said irritably. "What's all this talk going around about you and Charles Feltham, who's architect to the cathedral in Dalesbridge? We don't know Charles Feltham."

"I haven't a clue. I've not heard any talk."

"The vicar was quite annoyed. It seems that his wife saw you and this Feltham fella together in Dalesbridge, and as he seemed to be a friend of yours, she asked you to ask him to have a look at the church, and you refused."

"I certainly did. First, Mrs. Stole asked me to ask him to look over the church for nothing, which I shouldn't dream of doing. Second, it's not my business; the vicar should approach the dean. Third, Charles couldn't anyway, because he's finished his work in Dalesbridge, and leaves for Northumberland to restore a church there."

"So he's 'Charles', is he? You seem to know him very well. Why did you never ask him to dine here, and meet me?"

"It just didn't occur to me. We met by accident. I fell in the street, and he was passing and picked me up. I suppose you know women in London I've never met. don't you, but you don't feel obliged to ask them down here to dine and meet me."

"That's a very different matter. London's thirty miles away and Dalesbridge is four. And I hope you aren't suggesting I have unseemly relations with women in London?"

"Not so far as I know. I don't have unseemly relations with men, either."

"But you've been seen going into the Feltham fella's flat in Dalesbridge."

"So some tabby must have trailed me," Moira decided. She answered:

"Certainly. I've lunched with him there. Haven't you ever lunched or had tea in a woman's flat in London? If you tell me you have, I shan't conclude you went to bed with her afterwards. I didn't go to bed with Charles either, if that's what you're trying to find out."

"There's no necessity to be coarse," Roger proclaimed loftily. "What I can't understand is why you didn't ask him here, or why you wanted a male acquaintance I knew nothing about."

"Because I'm so damned sick of Wenton, and all the tabbies and their husbands. They're so stupid I could scream. Charles isn't stupid, and he could talk about something else besides village gossip. Besides, his job's very interesting. So, you see, I just wanted to keep him to myself. He wouldn't have felt in the least interested in being asked to dinner, and meeting some respectable Wenton married couple we should have asked to meet him. We might even have had to ask Stole and the vicar, and, from what you tell me, Stole would have tried to touch him for a free opinion on the state of the roof beams, or whatever it is. Nowadays, Roger, married people can have their own friends if they want to. I do happen to have a brain, whether you realize it or not, and I was longing to talk to someone with ideas outside the scope of this village."

"I think you've been very indiscreet, Moira. How long has this friendship, as you call it, been going on?"

"I haven't the slightest intention of telling you. Any-

way, it's over now, though we might perhaps meet once or twice in London when the church in Northumberland's finished. If it consoles you, you've no grounds for divorce, and I've no intention of providing you with any."

"I suppose," Roger said unkindly, "it was a middle-aged crush on a young man."

"No it wasn't. I should say Charles' is about the same age as I am."

"At any rate, you won't be seeing the fella again," Roger concluded. "I don't take this hint of a meeting with him in London seriously."

"You never take me seriously, Roger, except when you suspect I'm having what you'd call illicit relations with Charles. It might be better if you did. I'm not a fool, or a child, even if you think I am."

Roger glanced at her in some surprise, seemed about to speak, thought better of it, and retired to his study. When he had gone, Moira smiled cynically.

"It might almost have been better if I'd blotted my copybook with Charles," she murmured. "At least I should have had one more memory. But that would have made the whole thing sordid, and as it stands, it's one of the few beautiful things in my life."

Roger sulked for a few days, and then seemed to have dismissed Charles from his mind. After all, Charles had left Dalesbridge, never to return. But the news of Charles and Moira circulated the village to the point of boredom as far as Moira was concerned. Tabbies shopping in the morning would say to her:

"I hear you knew Mr. Feltham, the ecclesiastical architect, dear. He must have been a most fascinating man. How did you come to meet him?" to which Moira usually replied:

"Do you? In the street," when she replied at all and did not ignore the question. She reserved the pouring out of her scorn on all the tabbies of Wenton for Janet, when Janet had tea with Moira one afternoon.

"You can't misunderstand the local cats, dear," Janet replied. "They married when they were young and juicy, they've got men to keep them, heaven help the men, and they have no brains. They can do the washing up, and cook very badly, because it takes brains to cook, as you and I know, and they wash their smalls, and the only other interests they have are radio, television if their husbands can afford it, and the pictures. They probably have some children, poor little so-and-so's, and they'll be just like Mummy, except that the boys will go into the Army, and be shaken up there. If you'd had my nursing career, you'd realize that the average married woman is just too stupid for words. They have some intelligence before they marry, but marriage seems to destroy it. They become rather inefficient housemaids, and produce some children, and when they've produced some children they think they're the cat's whiskers, although you know as well as I do that, if you're married, it's far more trouble not to produce children than to produce them. And their husbands are absorbed in earning a living in the Bank, or whatever it is, and they have no mental life at all. That's why if you were a friend of this Feltham man, they absolutely lap it up, because it's what they'd like to do themselves, and they envy you. But they're so bogged down in the washing up, etc., that they haven't the time, or the intelligence to attract anyone but their husbands. And as their husbands treat them like bits of the furniture, life isn't very romantic. But then, if you want romance, you must be capable of inspiring romance."

"I'm afraid I can't inspire romance in Roger any more."

"That's because you're tired of him. You inspired romance in the man Feltham all right. But you're bored with Roger, and there you are. Fortunately, I'm not bored with Edward. If I were, I should probably get out. I could always earn my living nursing, and Derek doesn't want me any more from the practical point of view."

"You take a pretty grim view of life, Janet."

"One has to. Life's a pretty grim thing."

"Of course," Moira sighed, "you've a job at your finger tips. I haven't."

"Well, whose fault is that? You could have trained for a job before you married if you'd wanted to, but I suppose, in those days, you just expected to be married, and you were. But I assure you, my dear, a woman can't be too independent; whether she can always earn her living's a great background to a woman's married life. It gives her confidence, and God knows a married woman needs confidence if she can get it. The idea of having to ask your husband to give you twopence halfpenny to buy a stamp gets a bit boring if you don't realize that you could walk out on him and earn enough to buy your own stamps if you wanted to. Edward and I are still in love, and I wouldn't part with him for worlds, but nevertheless, it's a great satisfaction to know that, if we parted, I shouldn't be on my uppers, or dependent on alimony from him. Somehow, this knowledge makes marriage so much safer. It keeps both of you on your toes."

A week later, Moira had a letter from Charles. He said that the Northumberland village was charming, and the church a gem. He didn't expect to stay there more than a month, and then he would be back in his London flat, and she must come to lunch. He added that there was a restaurant in the block, presumably in case she thought he might have ulterior motives. He told her she was the nicest thing in the world, and that he loved her as much as ever.

Moira read this at the breakfast table with Roger opposite.

She replaced the letter in its envelope, and laid it beside her plate. Roger looked across and asked:

"An interesting letter, dear?" and Moira said it was.

"From anyone I know?" Roger proceeded, and Moira said:

"No." Roger seemed about to speak again, changed

his mind, and went on with his breakfast. Supposing it was from that Feltham fella, the fella was miles away. No doubt Moira would forget about him soon. Better to let sleeping dogs lie.

The summer passed slowly, as summers always did in Wenton. People with tennis courts gave tennis parties, and people with no tennis courts gave tea parties in the garden. At the end of July the school holidays began, and a clutter of children descended on the village. It was the done thing to tell the proud parents how George, or Mary, had grown.

In August, Moira and Roger took their summer holiday, at the seaside resort and in the seaside hotel where they had spent their summer holidays for the last ten years. There was an excellent golf course for Roger, and, as he worked all the year to win their bread, naturally consideration for him came first. The sands were ideal for bathing, and, as both Moira and Roger were good swimmers, they came nearer to one another while swimming than they did at any other time. One day Roger even congratulated Moira, as she stood in her wet trunks and *brassière*, on her figure, which, he said, was just as attractive as when she was first married. Moira smiled as she thanked him, but the words gave her no thrill. She knew that her figure was good, but Roger's opinion of it left her unmoved. He didn't want to make love to it, so what matter whether he thought it attractive or not?

She would have liked David to be with them, and perhaps Penny, but David and Penny had made their own plans. David was in Cornwall, with Margaret, although he had not told his parents he was with Margaret, of whom they had never heard. They swam together, and wandered along an almost deserted beach, or climbed the cliffs and made love on the sands under the moon, because Cornwall is an ideal spot in which to make love. They had a room each in separate cottages, and combined for meals. Margaret, who had always loved David up to a point, now found herself admiring him as well,

since he had made a place for himself, and a good place, in her own profession. Margaret was determined to become an editor when Miss Dusk, her own editor, retired, as probably she would within the next year, on reaching a retiring age. Margaret, in occasional day-dreams pictured herself as David's wife, though they had not so far spoken of marriage; but she was determined, if they married, to keep her own job. Nowadays, firms like hers were very obliging over leave if one of their outstanding women executives had a baby. And Margaret realized that, whomever she married, she couldn't give up her job, and degenerate into nothing but a housewife, who was a sort of general servant nowadays. Besides, all the best known women journalists in Fleet Street were married. A married couple needed two incomes if they were to be comfortable and give their children a good education.

Francis had persuaded Penny to stay with his married sister in Sussex, while he stayed there also. She accepted eagerly when Delia Storrington wrote and invited her. Francis had given a glowing description of the farm which Delia's husband ran; of the pedigree herd, the smiling cornland, the batteries of hens who did nothing but lay eggs, and so on.

"Delia's one of the best, if I do say it of my own sister, and so's Robert. Delia's too busy with her house and two small children, a boy and a girl, and Robert's too busy with his farm, to bother us at all; they'll just leave us to ourselves, and we can do what we like. I'll drive you down, and it'll all be very truly rural, and restful. I need a rest, even if you don't."

"I need one more than any poor girl ever needed one," Penny answered sadly. "If they hadn't finished that damned picture a week ago, I should probably be dead by now. The prospect of being fed on good farmhouse food, and turning into a rosy-cheeked country girl thrills me to bits. And you'll become all fit and sunburnt, and I shall get a new impression of you, which will be nice."

"Don't you care for your usual impression of me?"

"Darling," said Penny, who was sitting on his knees in a studio arm-chair, "you know I adore you, so why fish? The sad thing is you're getting so sure of me. You should never feel sure of a woman; they can change completely while you look at them, and then you have to begin all over again."

"I should be extremely pleased to begin all over again with you as many times as you like, but don't change if you can help it, because you're perfectly adorable as you are."

"You say the most divine things, Francis."

"Nothing's too good for you as far as I'm concerned," Francis told her, and moved aside her page's bob to kiss the back of her neck which her hair hid. "Your hair smells lovely, and your skin's like milk poured on white velvet."

"Nobody would ruin white velvet by pouring milk on it," Penny told him, "but thank you for the kind thought."

Francis drove her down to Sussex in what is known to the sort of people who like that kind of thing as a vintage sports car. This vehicle gave him a sense of adventure, and the exhaust note made him feel he was going faster than he really was. The car came of a distinguished make, and, in spite of her ten years, Penny preferred her infinitely to poor John's 1955 Bentley saloon. She sat beside Francis singing under her breath, while he swept her through the countryside, for the vintage car could still do her ninety miles an hour if asked, and obtained a new view of him.

"All men are children, and love their toys," she reflected; "but, then, all women are children too, and love their nylons, and undies, and so forth. No doubt when one ceases altogether to be a child, one has a foot in the grave." The thought of her grave did not worry her, because it seemed so incredibly far away.

Delia Storrington, who was small, dark, and merry,

with an attractive round face, and appeared to be about twenty-two, welcomed Penny as though she were a long lost sister, and took her up to her room, which had chintz curtains, bedspread, and chair covers, and looked out over the garden, while a charming tree, now in full leaf, grew not far away. Delia glanced round to see that everything was in its place, and said hospitably:

"Luncheon will be ready in half an hour, Penny. A bathroom, etc.'s next door. We have two of each, so you won't have to queue. Do get up when you like in the morning, because I'm always around from six a.m. onward—a farmer's wife has much to do—and I can fix you breakfast at any time. If there's anything you want that you don't see, please tell me. Francis is very fond of you, and I'm fond of him, so I'd like his girl-friend to be comfy here."

She smiled, and hurried away, intent on the myriad jobs which fall to the lot of a farmer's wife.

Penny came down a quarter of an hour later, groomed to a hair, in a little cotton dress, to find Francis in the lounge with gin and tonic awaiting her. As he poured her a drink, he said:

"You seem to have won my little sister's heart. She said you're sweet, which of course you are. How very clever of you. Robert, naturally, will fall at your feet, although he loves Delia very much. I think this is going to be a nice holiday."

"Thank you, Francis. It is a nice holiday already."

They ate an enormous luncheon, of good English beef and delicious vegetables from the garden, and a red currant tart made from home grown currants. It all tasted so different from London food. Robert duly fell at Penny's feet, and made a date with her to show her round the farm.

"No doubt Francis would do it," he admitted, "but he's only a poor townsman, and knows nothing about farms. Now I can really explain to you which is one end of a cow, and which is the other."

Accordingly, Penny spent a happy, lazy fortnight, and looked prettier than ever at the end of it. She had quite forgotten the agonies of filming. She had explained to the Summit Films outfit that she didn't want to film any more, and arranged to go back to Aubrey, Rhodes at the beginning of September. She could have taken herself on a cruise, or to the South of France, but she hated idleness, and this idyllic country holiday with Francis pleased her far better. On their last night at the farm, they went for a long walk all round the familiar fields, and in the course of it Francis asked:

"You do like me, don't you, sweetheart? It isn't just a crush?"

"Do you think that if I didn't like you I should be here with you, sponging on your poor little sister, Francis? How I admire that girl. She could run anything, from a farm to a jam factory."

"Thank you, Penny. That was all I wanted to know."

He did not pursue the subject further. He knew that Penny had been shaken by Mr. Schutzritter's crew, and needed time to get her breath and take her bearings. And besides, she now had a considerable financial reserve, perhaps not more than he had, but enough for him to take into consideration. She must be allowed time to reflect, and decide what, if anything, she proposed to do with her life. If she became a really outstanding model, as seemed likely, her fame might even eclipse that of her brief film career.

Moirá and Roger returned from their holiday to Winton, driven in Roger's car. As was his custom, he drove soberly, and cursed every driver who passed him or cut in on him. Moirá sat beside him in a blue mood. She had not enjoyed her holiday particularly, because the hotel had been full of married couples much like Roger and herself. True, some of them had had grown up children with them, and Moirá had envied these young people, who pleased themselves entirely, and didn't bother much about their parents. She remembered how much she had

had to bother about her parents at their age. And these young people had gone off on their own, and what they did in the evenings on the beach was between themselves and God. Their parents merely pretended that their young were really sitting in the hotel lounge, reading good books.

"And what wonderful lives these young people have," Moira reflected sadly, "with no inhibitions, and no obligations. How I should have loved to be like them at their age. The fact is, I've never really been free at any age. The only times when I felt free were when I was with Charles. How different this holiday would have been if I'd had Charles with me instead of Roger. But then, if I'd lived with Charles as long as I've lived with Roger, I suppose he'd be just as tired of me as Roger is."

It would have been nice to have had David and Penny with her on this holiday, but she quite understood why they had gone off on their own, throwing her the occasional picture postcard. They regarded home life as stuffy and dull, and, as, apparently, they could finance their own holiday, they had chosen love, life, and laughter, instead of conforming to the conventions of Roger and herself. Moira never dared to ask herself what sort of life Penny led. She hoped Penny was what Moira would have called a good girl, but she had no certainty as to whether Penny was a good girl or not. David, being a young man, had, she supposed the usual licence of young men. At the worst, a young man could never come home and say:

"Mummy, I'm going to have a baby," which gave the young man rather more freedom from parental control. But then, only a very stupid girl nowadays would find herself in the position of having to come home and say:

"Mummy, I'm going to have a baby, and I'm not married."

Roger drew up in front of their front door, rather tired with his long drive, and inclined to be cross. Mrs. Haines, apparently rejuvenated by a fortnight's rest,

greeted them with a smile. Moira considered that Mrs. Haines was only too glad to be back in her routine. Moira wished that she could say the same of herself.

However, Roger seemed to be of the same opinion as Mrs. Haines. He threw himself into an arm-chair in the sitting-room, sipped his favourite sherry, and said:

"Thank God we aren't staying in that damned hotel any longer. They simply don't know what good sherry is, and the food was foul. I like to think that we shan't have to stay there again for another fifty weeks."

As he had no work he could do in the study, Roger sat in the sitting-room with Moira, treated himself to one extra whisky to celebrate his homecoming, and talked in snatches. Finally he said:

"I don't know if you're tired or not, Moira, but I am. After all, I drove all the way back, and you didn't. I think it would be a good idea to go to bed."

"Very well, Roger."

She got up, and preceded him out of the doorway. She went upstairs, undressed, and prepared herself for the night. She thought how wonderful it would be if Roger were still in love with her, and wanted to celebrate their return with a new honeymoon. But Roger didn't. He came from his dressing-room, kissed her perfunctorily, spread his dressing gown at the foot of his bed as usual, and in five minutes was fast asleep. •

"And this," Moira thought sadly, "is how things will go on for the rest of my life, until I'm too old to care. But, there's nothing I can do about it. Roger would only be shocked if I bought a lot of what's called naughty underwear, and made advances to him. And I shall never be Charles's lover, because I doubt if he'd want me to. So there's nothing to look forward to, and if a woman can't look forward, she's as good as dead."

Chapter Eleven

DAVID, on his return home to the flat he now occupied in place of the one-room flatlet, sat smoking his pipe after dinner, reflecting on the memories of his holiday with Margaret. He decided that he loved her more than ever, and that she loved him, but he could not make up his mind whether she inclined towards marriage, either with him or anyone else.

As he saw it, Margaret was bitten with the career bug. Becoming a sub-editor had only whetted her ambition. She had had long talks with him about her proposed future, and how it was practically certain that, when Miss Dusk retired, she would be offered the editorship of *Dazzle*. She discussed with him all the improvements and alterations she proposed to make, and asked for suggestions.

"After all," she had said, "you, with your television line must understand what's laughingly called human interest. We have a pretty big circulation, but of course nothing like yours on television. I'd like you to tell me, if you can, what's the secret of human interest."

David wanted to say that, as far as he was concerned, it was being Margaret, but he knew that she was serious about her job, so he told her he thought the great secret was to keep things simple.

"Most people, as far as I can see, have simple minds, and a simple outlook, darling. And they're accustomed nowadays to have everything done for them, and not be obliged to depend on their own initiative; I mean, National Health, retirement pensions, children's allowances, and all that. My father's never tired of saying that there was none of all this in his young days, and that people then had to stand on their own feet entirely, or

else go under. He raves against the never-never system, because, as a young man he was taught not to buy anything until he'd saved up the money, and always to have a bit behind him in the Bank. And I gather that, though he was well-off, his father kept him pretty short of money, to let him learn how to make a little go a long way. I dare say people in his youth weren't so simple as they are now, but you and I have to cater for the present day crew, and so I don't think we can simplify things too much."

"You may be right, David. If you read some of the letters we get from readers, with the grammar and the spelling a disgrace, you'd find that they can't make up their own minds about the merest trifle. They write to ask us to tell them what to do."

"Well, darling, that's all I know. And now, could you please be kissed, because we're on our holiday, and we oughtn't to discuss work on our holiday."

Margaret was lying beside him on the sands, in a bikini and *brassière*, with David in swimming trunks. Looking at her, he thought how lovely her body seemed, and how little conscious she was of it, as far as he could make out. Perhaps she was very conscious of it, and only pretended to be unconscious. And he could not make up his mind whether she looked more attractive when her expression was thoughtful as it was now, or when she smiled. Then the thoughtful look disappeared, she turned towards him to be kissed, and the smile appeared. His kisses awoke her, and she made no protest when his caresses wandered over her. David, alone in his flat, thought that he would never forget that afternoon, when Margaret seemed to be nearer to him than ever before.

Now they were back at work, and Margaret had become once more the efficient young executive. Even when he took her to dinner at their favourite Caterpillar, which Margaret had refused to desert now that David earned good money, she had that groomed, varnished look which professional women esteem, as though she

wanted to exemplify her own fashion feature and beauty department. David began to long to see her at home in a battered overall, with her hair untidy. But there appeared to be no chance of that.

The proprietor of the Caterpillar, an Italian, who had seen many young people in various stages of love dining at his establishment, told himself:

"They will marry, those two. They are serious, which is rather sad at their ages. The young man will tie himself down to this charming young woman in his early twenties, and when he is thirty his mind will have developed much more than hers, and he will long for quite a different type of young woman. But Nature sets her trap for the young, and they always fall into it."

David knocked out his pipe, and decided:

"If I thought Margaret loved me as much as I love her, I'd ask her to marry me, but, as far as I can see, she's much more in love with *Dazzle* than she is with me, and I merely exist to satisfy her when she wants to be kissed and made love to." And this showed just how clever Margaret was being with David, for there is nothing like a few obstacles in his path to cause a young man to reach the point of proposing marriage. And as the average young woman may, perhaps, have the choice of three men as possible husbands in her lifetime, and David was a very worth while young man, his chances with Margaret were better than he imagined.

He took her back to his flat one evening after giving her dinner, seated her in an arm-chair, gave her a cigarette, and asked:

"Tell me, darling, what do you want from life? Are you set on being one of these brilliant spinsters, such as we have on the *Harvest*, whose names are a household word among readers, who fly all over the world, and turn out the most marvellous copy in the most difficult circumstances? Or do you want love, and marriage, and children, and a real home of your own? I don't call a flat a home. I mean a house, preferably with a garden."

Margaret, who saw exactly how things were shaping, purported to show considerable reserve. In a few minutes she might be committing herself for life, or at least until the divorce was made absolute; therefore she said thoughtfully:

"I suppose I want love, and marriage, and children, and a home just as any other woman wants them. But I could never give up my job. You don't need any brains to have children, or run a home. Anybody can run a home who likes to give up the time to it, and having children's automatic. I want more from life than just being a sort of brood mare *cum* cook-housekeeper. In that case, I shouldn't have any mental life at all."

"I only wanted to know. I've always thought that having children and running a house wasn't just the job for an intelligent girl," David replied. "Any female can do that, however obscure. One hears that having a child gives a woman some remarkable satisfaction, but I should say it's all vanity; the vanity of reproducing yourself, you know. But then you mayn't reproduce yourself. You may reproduce your grandfather, or your mother, or anybody else in the generations before you. So even the vanity's washed out."

Margaret listened to this very thoughtfully also. She felt that David had taken her literally when he ought to have known that she was shooting at a line, and to be taken literally when you are shooting a line is rather impossible. David should have known that a woman's destiny is to marry and have children, that if she avoids it she will never be happy, but that, to-day, she can combine a job with the marriage and the children, and so have the best of both worlds. As men, she reasoned, don't devote their lives to their children, but proceed with their careers, why shouldn't a woman? And look how many women did, nowadays.

David took Margaret home and kissed her good night, and returned to his flat slightly more mystified about her than ever. For, if a wife didn't put her marriage, and

her husband, before her career, what use was there in a man's marrying? He had to put his wife and family before his career; if, for instance, he was offered a good job in an unhealthy climate, nothing would justify his sacrificing his wife and children to the unhealthy climate.

"The fact is," David concluded, with all the wisdom of twenty-one, "if you marry, you can't please yourself any more, so that you've got to be certain that the girl's worth the sacrifice. Margaret would be to me, if she hadn't all these odd ideas about having the advantages of being married and not married at the same time."

David's problem over Margaret might never have been resolved if, a month after their holiday, she had not developed acute influenza. Nadia rang him up and gave him the grim news. Margaret's temperature was 104 degrees, and the doctor had insisted on a day nurse. At night, Nadia could look in on her from time to time. David said he would go round at once, and Nadia forbade it. Margaret, she said, was much too ill for visitors, even for David. So David sent fruit and flowers, and a letter with them which she was incapable of reading at the time. Seated alone in his flat that night, David realized what it would mean to him if Margaret were to die. Come what might, when she recovered, as he hoped she would, he must persuade her to marry him, for otherwise life would lack all meaning.

When at last Nadia said he could visit Margaret, he found her lying in her divan bed looking very pale and weak. The high temperature had subsided, and now reaction had set in. She smiled faintly at him, thanked him for his flowers, and fruit, and the letter, which she had only been able to read that morning. David took her hand, and found it limp and lifeless. A lump rose in his throat; he choked it down and said gently:

"Poor darling, I'm so sorry. You must have had a frightful time."

And then, quite helplessly, Margaret began to cry. She did not sob, but the tears welled from her eyes, and she

was unable to control them. David, who had never seen a woman cry before, felt terrified. He took out his handkerchief, and tried to wipe away the tears, but they still trickled down her cheeks. He did not know that Margaret was not crying from pain, or misery, but from sheer weakness. At last, he bent over and kissed her, and begged her:

"Please don't cry, darling, or you'll break my heart. The worst's over, and all you have to do now is to get strong again."

He felt one of Margaret's arms go round his neck. She kissed back, as far as she was able, and said in her faint voice:

"I'm sorry I'm such a fool, but you were so nice to me, and suddenly I flopped. I promise not to do it again. Thank you ever so much for taking care of me."

"If only you'd let me take care of you always I'd feel completely happy," David told her half desperately. "If only you'd marry me, you could go on with your job as far as I'm concerned. I know perfectly well you'd never be happy without it. On the other hand, I shall never be happy without you, and I want to be happy. Please, Margaret, won't you marry me?"

Strangely, Margaret's temperature did not go up again. She stopped crying, her cheeks flushed faintly, and she looked at David with eyes like stars.

"I've always hoped you'd say that one day," she answered. "Yes, darling, I'd love to marry you. I'm sorry I look so plain just now; I can't think why you want to marry such a plain-looking girl. But I'll get my good appearance, as secretaries call it, back from now on, because I'm so happy I could die."

Continuing to hold her hand, in a firm clasp which seemed to her to fill her with strength and courage, David said:

"Please don't die. I just couldn't bear it."

The day nurse came in with Margaret's tea on a tray and said firmly:

"I'm afraid you must go now, Mr. Heysham. You've been here half an hour, and Miss Goodwood's still very weak." David stood up and smiled at the starched figure before him.

"I'll go quickly now, nurse. Everything's all set, because Miss Goodwood's promised to marry me. I took advantage of her weakness while she wasn't strong enough to refuse."

The nurse gave her patient a careful look, and Margaret smiled up at her. The nurse said at last:

"Technically, you oughtn't to have excited my patient, Mr. Heysham, but I don't think you've done her any harm. In fact, she looks better already."

When Margaret had recovered and was back at work, David called for her in a taxi and took her back to his flat for dinner. After dinner they sat for some minutes in the intimate silence of lovers, and then Margaret said:

"Shall you mind waiting to be married until spring, David? You see, it's definite now that Miss Dusk is resigning the editorship of my magazine at the end of the year, and I have it privately from the directors that I'm going to be the new editor. But if I married before taking over the editorship, the directors might change their minds. They'd think that with all the excitement of a new marriage, and a new home to run, I couldn't give all my attention to the magazine. But once I'm editor, and have shown how well I can edit, they won't mind if I marry. I hope you don't think I'm trying to make you play second fiddle to a magazine, but I've set my heart on editing it, and I couldn't bear to throw away the chance for the want of remaining single a few months longer."

At this, David felt very sad. He had hoped to marry Margaret within a month. But he inherited the rather grim business instincts of Roger, who would have let nothing, and particularly no woman, turn him aside from his job. So, David, who knew that Margaret loved him

very much, and longed to be married, understood her reason for postponing marriage. Short of loving him, her job was her life, and he would not dream of interfering with it. Therefore, he said:

"I know just how you feel, darling. I shall hate waiting till the spring, but I have a job too, and I know one must never let anything interfere with one's job."

Margaret slid one hand into his, and sighed from relief.

"The most wonderful thing about you is you always understand," she told him. "Lots of men would have gone right up in the air if they'd been asked to wait six months for a girl purely on account of her job. The average man, you know, doesn't take either a woman or her job seriously."

On the following Saturday, Penny finished posing for some fashion sketches Francis was making, and went round to look at the results.

"You're damned clever, aren't you, Francis?" she commented. "You've even made these exquisite dresses and sports things look better than they are. However do you manage it?"

"Sheer virtuosity," Francis answered. "I'm not at all sure what 'virtuosity' means; it can't have anything to do with 'virtue', or it wouldn't be applicable to me. I can only suppose that if one has virtuosity, one is, in the language of the vulgar, the cat's whiskers. As you so rightly decided, I *am* the cat's whiskers when it comes to art. That's why I make a lot of money. Isn't money lovely—not the money itself, but what it can buy?"

"Simply heavenly, my sweet. I never knew how heavenly till I made some out of that cross-eyed picture. And now I'm back with dear Aubrey, and famous in a mild way, and he pays me a lot more than he used to do. In fact I've saved up quite a bit for my old age, when I'm twenty. For what good is a girl of twenty to anyone? She's too mature to be attractively damn' silly, and who wants a calculating, mature girl?"

"God knows. But don't make out a person of twenty to be senile; remember I'm twenty-six."

"I was talking about girls, dear. Men aren't fit to be seen with at twenty. I've always said that the age of consent for men should be thirty. Before that they shouldn't be allowed to marry. If you've finished with me, may I go into your bedroom and take off this borrowed finery, and put on my clothes, and be Me again?"

"Of course you can. You can have a bath if you want to, as long as I can sit on the edge of the bath and talk to you."

"Thank you. I think you'd be too distracting on the edge of the bath. I should never remember to wash behind my ears. Anyway, I don't need a bath. I had one this morning."

"And when you come back, we'll discuss that dirty crack of yours about the age of consent for men being thirty. I shall have quite a lot to say on the subject."

Penny walked beautifully out of the studio into the bedroom, took off her borrowed plumes, folded them methodically, and assumed the jersey and skirt which were her own. Having knotted a green silk scarf around her neck, and washed her hands in the bathroom, she returned to the studio, and said:

"I'm a clean girl now. Look!"

She held out both her hands, palms upward, and Francis kissed them both, as she had hoped he would. She told him gratefully.

"You have the prettiest gestures, Francis. You understand the little side of love-making, and that a girl doesn't always want to be torn to bits, or dragged round the room by her hair; though it would be difficult to drag me round the room by my hair, as it's fairly short."

"I don't want to drag you round the room by your hair. I'm intelligent, even if you can't realize it. And now, what's all this about thirty's being the age of consent for a man?"

"I was talking about the average man. As you say,

you're intelligent. One might perhaps allow you to consent at twenty-nine."

"I couldn't wait three years for you," Francis said with an air of finality. "The fine flower of my love would have bloomed by then if I hadn't married you, and the autumn would be nigh. There wouldn't be much use in your marrying me in the autumn of my love. We should just sit by the fire and watch television, anything duller than which I can't imagine. I consider that all people who watch television should be put in homes for the feeble-minded."

"You and Daddy should get on. He won't have television in the house."

"Estimable as your father may be, and doubtless is, he only interests me inasmuch as he produced you."

"I always thought Mummy produced me."

"She couldn't have done it without your father. Pray give him his due. And I'm sure you take after him, and that he distilled all the wisdom of his lifetime for your benefit. He has reason to be satisfied with the result, and I'm grateful to him."

Penny sat down on the arm of an arm-chair and asked:

"Is this leading anywhere, Francis, because I'm not good at crossword puzzles."

"I think you should allow me to develop my theme," Francis said rather mournfully. "One can only arrive at a conclusion through a series of logical sequences. Briefly, I was about to ask you to marry me, but if I have to wait till I'm twenty-nine before I can do it, there seems no point on going on. What shall I be like, and where shall I be, when I'm twenty-nine, if I live so long?"

Penny, who had become in one second a mere mass of female satisfaction, because she wanted nothing so much as to marry Francis, but had always feared that one of his other girls would carry off the prize, asked plaintively:

"Must you always throw my words in my face, Fran-

cis? Don't you realize I was generalizing about men, and that when you asked me to make an exception for you, for very shame, repeat shame, I could only knock off one year for your benefit? If I'd said that any time after the age of fifteen could be the age of consent for you, it would have looked as though I were asking you to marry me, or some other girl. But, as I have no interest in your marrying any other girl, obviously I should have been suggesting a journey to the register office for you and me. I've always set my face against what's called a white wedding, and all the superstitions connected with it."

"Then may I take it," Francis asked with maddening deliberation, "that you will marry me, Penny darling, angel, sweetheart, precious?"

"Whom else would I want to marry?" Penny asked as one humouring an idiot child. "We've been around together for ages, we've worked together, you make love divinely, and you'll never find another girl like me who's rapturously attractive, has a brain, and lets herself be kissed just as you want her to. But you don't know the half of me yet, Francis. I can be a perfect she-devil as far as making love goes, but I've never been a perfect she-devil with you, so far. It might have made me look as though I wanted you, and that would have been fatal. A man never wants a girl who appears to be crazy about him. This is very odd, but I've noticed it over and over again in my chequered life."

"Have you ever been a perfect she-devil over any man, Penny?"

"I have over a guy called Spike, who lives in my part of the world. But as I never had any intention of marrying Spike, and he never had any intention of marrying me, what did it signify? A good time was had by all, and there the matter ended."

"And you propose to marry me rancid, if I may use the word, with Spike's kisses?"

"Certainly, darling. What do they matter to you?"

And anyway, you're probably rancid, as you put it so poetically, with the kisses of all the naked models in Chelsea, so you should talk. At least I've always posed for you with my clothes on. In fact, the clothes were all you wanted for business purposes. I was just the pretty clothes-horse."

"In another minute, Penny, I shall spank you."

Penny slid off the arm of the chair and approached him delicately.

"Go on then, spank me," she said calmly. "Better be spanked by you, darling, than mucked about by any other man. I shall howl, but I shall love it."

"In that case, it would be a more suitable punishment not to spank you. Where shall we go for our honeymoon? I have dreams of flying to France, with the car, and motoring through France into Spain. Would you like to motor through France into Spain?"

"It would be out of this world," Penny said dreamily, putting one arm round his neck, and leaning her head on his shoulder. "I've never been anywhere except to school, and to Eastbourne, where my Papa spends every summer holiday, and various runs in cars. The beautiful, sophisticated model, Miss Penny Heysham, is just about as ignorant of places as some poor little girl who spends her life hearthstoning doorsteps, if any such are left."

"And how soon can we get married, darling?"

"Just as soon as you like. It is, of course, quite wrong of me to say that. I ought to hold off, and prevaricate, and make you wait for me, but the hell of it is I don't want to wait for you. I have a yen for you, Francis. I shall have to tell my Papa, and that creates a problem, because I'm under age, and if he won't give me permission I can't marry till I'm twenty-one, a year from now. However, I should tell him in that case that I'd apply to the magistrates for their permission. It isn't as if you were undesirable, angel. You have fame, and money, and you're of good appearance, and you were

brought up, not dragged up. I know that, because I've brought you up a good deal myself. And as it would look distinctly odd for the senior partner in a distinguished firm of London solicitors to have his daughter go to the beaks because he wouldn't let her marry a most eligible—chrn!—young man, I dare say he won't refuse me permission. My Mama will be more trouble. She still thinks I'm about seven, though I know far more of the world than she does, and she'll say she's never seen you, and want you to come down and be inspected. You'd hate that, wouldn't you."

"With all respect to your Mama, I should loathe it. Why not let me ask you and your Mama and Papa to lunch at the Savoy, or Claridges, or somewhere like that? They couldn't hardly make a scene at the Savoy, or Claridges. I leave it to you to break it to your Mama that we're being married at a register office. She'll want you to be married in the village church, so's she can weep over the affecting spectacle of you in white satin. But of course, we can invite her to the register office, if she'd sully her shoes with such a place, and give her a party afterwards."

"It would be much more of a thrill for her. Me being an ex-film star, and a star model, I shall cause a crowd to collect, and there'll be oodles of the press, and camera men with those flash bulbs that go *pop!* and perhaps a couple of mounted police to keep order. I should adore a couple of mounted police. Their horses are in such good style."

Francis kissed her lingeringly and appreciatively.

"You're too sweet for words," he told her. "Henceforth my life will be one long dream of heaven. Can you go down and break the news to your parents this weekend, and get it over?"

"Surely."

"I hate to think of your facing the music alone."

"It would only make things worse if you were there. They'd have to be polite, and then, after you'd gone out

to play golf with my Papa—do you play golf? I hope not. Nobody with a brilliant mind should play golf. It's the ideal game for boneheads—my Mama would take it all out on me in private, and I should probably say undaughterly things."

In fact, all passed off quietly in the Heysham home.

Penny announced casually after dinner:

"I'm going to get married, Daddy. He's a very distinguished artist, and I simply adore him. And, as I'm a star model, and rather attractive, he's crazy about me."

"Good God!" said Roger, who, though he knew that Penny had what it takes, had never, somehow envisaged her marrying, or not for years anyway.

"But Penny!" Moira exclaimed in a shocked voice. "An artist! We all know what artists are; undependable, thriftless, living from hand to mouth, and incapable of sticking to one woman. I really don't think this can be allowed. Besides, we don't know anything about him, and he may be most undesirable."

"He probably makes as much money as Daddy does," Penny said loftily, "and he has the most divine car. And, anyway, if he dished me the dirt after we were married, and walked out on me, which he wouldn't do, I've a good deal of money salted away, and I earn a good living."

"Possibly the money you have salted away is part of the attraction, dear. In any case, I couldn't possibly consent to your marriage until I've seen this man, and know him very well, and you've been engaged at least twelve months."

"Well, Daddy," Penny asked calmly, "are you going to refuse me permission to marry? I haven't cost you anything for a year, and I'm earning my own living. I consider myself quite independent."

"What's the man's name?" Roger asked authoritatively.

"Francis Hetherington. You must have seen his

sketches in the papers and magazines. He does a lot of fashion stuff."

"I never look at fashion drawings," Roger replied, as though spurning some unclean thing. "And, as you say, I can refuse you permission to marry if I choose. I don't say I am going to refuse you permission, but you've rather thrown this at our heads."

"Just as you please, darling. We propose to get married a month from now. If you don't give me permission, I can apply for it to the magistrates, and if they don't give it me we shall just live in what you'd call sin till I come of age. We shall marry in a register office, by the way. I don't want a programme wedding, and white satin, and all that. And if I have to live in sin, it'll be entirely your fault and Mummy's."

Penny then sat and smiled, like the Indian ocean, and waited for comment. It came from Moira, who said rather despairingly:

"But how long have you known this Mr. Hetherington?"

"Oh, a year or more. I met him first when I was posing for him. I've posed for him dozens of times since."

"But not, surely, without your clothes on?"

"My dear Mummy, I'm a fashion model. The clothes were the most important part. He could get a dozen girls to pose with nothing on, but I happen to be able to model clothes. That's why he used me."

"Well," said Roger, "I don't propose to forbid your marriage, because if this man's a distinguished artist, he must be all right. No man can make a good living if he isn't all right. But he'd better come down and stay here a week-end, and let us look him over."

"I couldn't bear him to be looked over, and gaped at by the village as my *fiancé*. Besides, I don't know if he is my *fiancé*. We just agreed to get married. We didn't arranged to be engaged. As you can see, I haven't even an engagement ring. I dare say I shall have, but I couldn't care less if I do or not. Francis asked if you

and Daddy would lunch with us at the Savoy, or Claridges and meet him. I call that fair enough.

This suggestion of a luncheon at the Savoy, or Claridges, destroyed Roger's remaining scruples. The man must be doing well if he could afford a luncheon party at the Savoy, or Claridges. And, with the world as it is, Roger felt that money counted. If Penny was to marry, he would like to see her well fixed.

"This is all very irregular," Moira complained rather faintly, to which Penny replied:

"I'm rather irregular myself. I'm a wicked model, and a shocking film actress. You ought to feel glad I want to be respectably married, Mummy. Please remember my occupations. I'm not the vicar's little daughter, although from all we hear, vicar's little daughters often live extremely odd lives."

Penny then excused herself, and went to bed. Moira and Roger sat silent for some time, till Moira said:

"You seem to take this news very calmly, Roger," to which Roger replied:

"Why not? It's Penny's life, and one can't lead other people's lives for them. And Penny knows far more of the world as it is to-day, from a young woman's point of view, than you do, my dear. Penny's been on her own in London for the last year or so, and you've never been on your own in London. It's a damned good job she wants to be married and not live in sin, as she calls it. Marriage as you and I understand it is a thing of the past. Penny and her young man would never settle in Winton, and stodge around in the village for the rest of their lives. They'll probably have a flat with a cocktail bar in it, and give suppers consisting of dry Martinis and hot dogs, whatever hot dogs are."

Luncheon with Penny and Francis at the Savoy almost convinced Moira that Penny was making a satisfactory marriage. Francis looked very beautiful in his grey Saxony suit, which obviously came from the pearl of tailors, his manners were impeccable, his looks were good, and he

paid court the whole time to Moira, practically neglecting Penny, who complained to him bitterly about this neglect afterwards.

The marriage destroyed the last of Moira's doubts. There was, as Penny had foretold, a crowd of press men and photographers at the register office, together with a congregation of 'teen-agers who wanted to see the female star of *Delilah Comes to Stay*, and the man she had kindly consented to marry. And somehow, Francis had contrived to have two mounted policemen on duty to control the crowd, with their horses in such good style, just as Penny had desired. The reception in the Pinafore Room at the Savoy appeared dazzling to Moira. There were all sorts of people present famous in the film and art worlds, and she gaped at them politely, and felt very much the Wenton matron by comparison. Francis introduced all the most important men to her, and Roger to all the prettiest girls, and both enjoyed themselves very much. Back in Wenton, which seemed extremely flat after this glimpse of the great world of art and the cinema, Moira went to bed without a pang, and did not even shed the conventional tears of a mother who has surrendered her daughter to a man to do what he wills with.

David and Margaret married in the spring, but their wedding did not arouse any doubts in Moira's mind. The girl was an editor, and there is nothing flashy about an editor, and no one cares what happens to a young man. He is supposed to be able to look after himself, and if he can't, no one has any sympathy with him.

This wedding also took place at a register office. Moira sighed at the thought that there would not be one white wedding in her family, for she came of the generation which loved to see a girl dressed in white for her marriage, and everything to emphasize the virginity she would lose very shortly afterwards. However, all this seemed mildly obscene to Penny and Margaret, so they preferred to marry in delicious day dresses. Margaret and

David, more conventional and less imaginative than Penny and Francis chose to honeymoon in Cornwall, where they had finally fallen in love. They had found a flat in Kensington, whereas Penny and Francis, more prosperous, had taken a house in Chelsea, where they could give good parties which would duly be chronicled in the gossip columns, as long as they invited the gossip writers, which they would not fail to do.

Moirá realized that her children were now launched in a world as foreign to hers as the moon, in which she could have no part. This made her heart ache, but Roger only laughed.

"We're damned lucky, my dear," he said firmly. "Our two children are happily married, and financially sound. If they don't want to come down to Wenton, and who could blame them, because Wenton means nothing to them, what does it matter? You can't expect a grown man and a woman to be tied to your apron strings for ever."

But, in the illogical way of mothers, who never know when to let go of their children, this was just what Moirá did expect, and the failure of her expectation saddened her. It was, of course, maternal vanity. She could not bear to realize that Penny and David could get on perfectly well without her.

Chapter Twelve

AUTUMN had come again; Moira gazing out of the sitting-room French windows could see smoke curling up from a heap of leaves the gardener was burning. Soon it would be time to turn on the central heating; Wenton ladies would begin to appear in elephant's leg boots, and there would be a blazing fire in the saloon bar of the Golden Fleece in the main street, where Wenton ladies would drop in after their shopping to buy one another a drink: all except Mrs. Stole, of course.

Mrs. Stole had expressed great concern because both Penny and David had been married in register offices, to which Moira had replied:

"How could I help that? They were their weddings, and I suppose they were entitled to be married as they pleased?"

"But you had them in your care from their earliest years, dear. Surely you could so have influenced them that they'd have *wanted* to be married in church?"

Moira thought of Mrs. Stole's bleak children, all at present well under their parents' thumbs.

"You wait till yours grow up," she warned. "You won't be able to do a thing with them, even if you *have* had them in your care from their earliest years. They'll react from all you dinned into them in a very marked way, and no one will be more surprised than you."

Mrs. Stole had sighed, and said good-bye. There were times when she really could not *understand* Moira.

The light waned. Moira turned from the French windows, switched on the electric lights, and drew the curtains. Mrs. Haines appeared with tea, which she set on a low table beside an arm-chair.

"The days are drawing in, madam," she said, with

the meteorological passion of her type. "We shall soon be having to think of Christmas."

"Oh, please, Mrs. Haines," Moira protested. "I don't like to think of Christmas. We shall be all alone, because I don't suppose Mr. David and his wife, or Mrs. Hetherington and her husband will want to spend Christmas here. They'll be able to have a much gayier time in London."

"It's always the same, madam. You rear children, and then they get married, and they don't want to be bothered with you any more. As you know my son's in Australia, and my daughter's married and lives in Yorkshire, and I shall get a Christmas card from each, and that'll be that."

Having dispensed her gloom, Mrs. Haines adjourned to her comfortable kitchen and her own tea.

Moira poured herself a cup of tea, selected a piece of toast, and sat looking at the tea tray. It seemed that one would have to adjust oneself to a new life even less interesting than life had been in the past. Even if Penny and David had gone their own ways for the last year or so, their week-end presence had brightened the house. Now there would be only Moira and Roger.

Sipping her tea, Moira let her thoughts recreate her past life, and tried to see why she had made rather a poor thing of it. At first all had gone well. She had been eighteen in 1931, a year which now seemed as remote as the Peninsular War. Her father had been a prosperous barrister, so there was no need for her to train for a job. They lived in London, and Moira spent her time at parties and dances, and indulged in the flirtations which had seemed so daring then, and looked so mild in retrospect compared with the love-life of Penny and her generation. At twenty she had married Roger, whom she had met through her father's being instructed by Roger's father's firm. At once she knew, or thought she knew, that she had really fallen in love for the first time in her life. They were married, and Roger's father had bought them the house at Wenton, because Roger wanted to live in the country, and what Roger wanted was Moira's law.

After that, her children came, and then the war, when Roger had served in the Judge Advocate General's department. His work took him into various theatres of war, and she saw little of him for five years. She remembered asking him what a Judge Advocate General was, and Roger had replied:

"He's neither a judge, nor an advocate, nor a general."

Throughout the bombing she spent most of her nights in her deep shelter with David and Penny, and struggled to feed them adequately on inadequate rations. When Roger returned finally to his practice, Moira's parents were dead, and also Roger's father, so that Roger became senior partner, which was just as well considering the high cost of living and the high level of taxation. And, when Roger came back, he was a stranger. Even the most passionate marriage will not survive five years' separation, and even before the war Roger had ceased to be particularly passionate. It was rather like Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort over again. Moira, like Her late Majesty, had all the passion on her side, and Roger, like the Prince Consort, put up with it as best he could, and immersed himself in work.

Before the war ended, David and Penny were at their preparatory schools, and Moira remained alone in Winton, doing canteen work for refugees, paying the regulation visits to her children's schools, and trying to make the school holidays as happy as possible in spite of the war. She looked forward constantly to Roger's return, and when he returned saw that there had been nothing to look forward to. Roger was very kind and polite, made love to her occasionally, and for the rest seemed entirely absorbed in his practice.

She did not think there was another woman in his life. If there had been, she would have known instinctively. It just seemed that Roger was not one of the world's great lovers, and preferred golf to women.

At one time she had tried to do what she called tart herself up, and had bought some rather frivolous under-

wear. But one night when she was undressing, Roger had pointed to her and said:

"Those drawers aren't fit to be run over by a bus in. What would the nurses in a hospital think if the wife of a well-known solicitor was carried in wearing those things?" So now the frivolous underwear lay hidden in a drawer, and would never be seen again.

Pouring her second cup of tea, Moira re-lived the only visit she had paid to Charles in London. She had started from Wenton full of emotion and expectation. Surely he would remember all those kisses in the flat in Dalesbridge, the long afternoons, the affection and confidences?

She had discovered sadly that environment is everything. The atmosphere of Charles's flat and that of the flat in Dalesbridge had been poles apart. She found Charles charming, amusing, and attentive, but the old magic had departed, the magic of her for him. True, he had kissed her, but his kisses were as sister's kisses. And on the mantelpiece in his sitting-room had stood the photograph of a most attractive girl who looked about twenty-five. Moira concluded that all Charles's interests were now centred on the attractive girl, and she envied her more than she could have said. Henceforth, Charles would pay all his regard to the attractive girl, and Moira would only be a fading memory, the memory of a woman who had made a dull country town seem a little brighter than it would have seemed otherwise.

When she left, Charles had pressed her to visit him again, but she knew quite well that she never would. The star dust and bath salts of their relationship had departed, and only dead ashes remained. She would never visit Charles again and he would never come to Wenton to seek her out.

"I suppose I shall send him a Christmas card," Moira told herself mournfully. "I can't send him one of ours, from Mr. and Mrs. Heysham, so I shall go into the village stationer's and pick one of those crazy things with

a bit of silly verse printed on it. And when he gets it, Charles will throw it into the waste paper basket."

Mrs. Haines came in to take away the tea tray, and Moira, alone, lit another cigarette, and asked herself:

"How am I to face all the years I've got to live, because as I'm only forty-four, and we're supposed to last till seventy at least, that leaves me twenty-six to get through. It's quite certain I shan't have another baby, so there'll only be Roger and me. And Roger will get more and more disenchanted as the years go on."

She wished that she could pain, or was what she would have called "literary," but she couldn't, and she wasn't. She never did any serious reading; the current best-selling novel satisfied her. She didn't care for golf, and even if she had cared for it, Roger would never have wanted to play with her. Roger's golf was a sacred thing, and he only wanted to play with male tigers. The clack of the Wenton tabbies drove her crazy, because she happened to be the intelligent daughter of an intelligent father.

"The fact is," she concluded, "that God hates women. Once they've fulfilled their breeding functions, He counts them out. Unless they're leading actresses, or in some profession, there's nothing left for them after forty except to rot. I simply couldn't belong to the W.V.S., and devote myself to good works. I don't mind the good works, but I couldn't stand the company. Besides, it would only be a fiction for me, laughing with tears in my eyes so to speak."

The stark fact then faced her,

"For the rest of my life I shall just be Roger's wife, and nowadays that amounts to practically nothing. I shall never reach the heights of passion any more, and if anybody says a woman of my age doesn't want the heights of passion, he, or she's talking sheer damned nonsense. If any man wanted the height of passion from me, and no man does, although I'm still attractive, and my figure's good, he'd be far more satisfied than he would have been when I was twenty-one, and knew

practically nothing. But opportunity only knocks at one's door once, and it will never knock at mine again."

She did not even want to cry. Her sadness was too acute for tears. And soon Roger would come home, and she would need to create a picture of the perfect wife, good-humoured, acquiescent, competent about the house, a good hostess to all sorts of dull people, and the rest, a perfect convenience for her husband in fact, with no starry-eyed ideas about romance, or the finer side of love.

She sat dreaming of her youth, and early loves, and the first months with Roger until the click of the front door told her that he was back. With perfect timing, Mrs. Haines brought in sherry just before he had finished taking off his coat and hat, and depositing the inevitable brief case in his study.

Directly he entered the sitting-room, it became clear that something had pleased him. He said:

"Hullo, Moira!" quite heartily, and a smile played about his lips. Moira said "Hullo!" back, and waited for what might be coming. After Roger had taken a sip of his sherry it came.

"We won the Cuthbertson case after all," he informed her, though frankly I thought it would be touch and go. But Tom Hereford, our leader, simply tore the other side to pieces in his closing speech, and the jury were only out ten minutes. That's rather a feather in my cap."

"Oh, splendid," said Moira, who had not the least idea what the Cuthbertson case was about. However, she could read the report in the *Times* next day. "You must be very pleased with life, Roger."

"I am, as a matter of fact. And Tom's coming down on Saturday to lunch at the Club, and play golf. He's a grand bloke, and he and I get on very well."

Moira realized that she was unlikely to see the grand bloke. He would probably depart by car or train for London after his luncheon and his golf. Roger would return torpid from fresh air and exercise, and probably fall asleep in his arm-chair after dinner. Looking at

him, it occurred to her that he was putting on weight. It didn't matter a great deal, as he was tall, but the deterioration in his figure distressed her mildly. He finished his sherry, and went upstairs to wash. The punctual Mrs. Haines served dinner on the stroke of seven-thirty. Moira picked at hers, but Roger ate with relish.

"You seem off your feed," he told Moira. "Why not get Quantock to give you a tonic? We don't want you to fade away."

Moira had a wild impulse to ask:

"What is there for me to keep myself alive for," but she restrained herself, and answered:

"Perhaps I will. Autumn's a rather trying time."

During the rest of dinner, Roger discussed the garden. The borders, he thought, hadn't done very well during the past summer. It might be a good idea to replant them. Moira agreed that it might, and the matter appeared to be settled. They retreated to the sitting-room as usual for coffee, and Roger retailed one or two biting passages from Tom Mereford's speech. Then silence fell, broken only by the entrance of Mrs. Haines to collect the coffee service. When she had said good night, Roger wound his wrist watch, and said after a pause:

"Do you realize that Christmas is only just around the corner?"

"Yes, Roger. Mrs. Haines reminded me of it at tea time."

"I suppose we shall be on our own," Roger continued. "David and Penny won't want to bring their new partners down, though no doubt you'll invite them. They don't like Wenton, it appears. I can't think why."

"Don't you realize that it's completely dead from their point of view?"

"Well, Penny had Spike," Roger pointed out with a polite leer. "However, I don't suppose she'd want him now. She has better fish to fry. And David never had a girl in these parts. I used to think at one time that girls didn't mean a thing to him. I'm glad I was wrong. His Margaret appeals to me very much. Now, there's a

girl with a brain. I daresay she'll be a director of her firm one day. They have women directors of these firms which publish women's magazines, you know."

He gazed thoughtfully at Moira, as though realizing that, alas, she had no brain. Moira answered with faint bitterness:

"Lucky Margaret! If she ever gets fed up with David, or David gets fed up with her, she'll always have her career."

"But you didn't want a career."

"I didn't when I could have had one, and now that I'm left alone in this house, it's too late."

"There's no use crying over spilt milk," Roger, who had a career, answered comfortably. "You must remember that you and I are on the shelf nowadays. In a year we may be grandparents. How shall you like being called granny?"

"I don't suppose I shall mind. Marlene Dietrich is a grandmother, and she's alluring enough."

"Marlene Dietrich is somewhat different from you, dear," Roger pointed out rather superfluously. "As I say, we're on the shelf. We've fulfilled our function as parents, and Nature isn't interested in us any longer. We're all alone now, and I suppose all that's left for us to do is to dodder down to the grave, except that I've given instructions that I'm to be cremated."

"Yes, that's all, Roger."

"Still, we've had a good life."

"Yes, Roger."

Moira glanced slowly round the room as though she had never seen it before. She said at last:

"I think I'll go to bed, if you don't mind. I'm rather tired, for some reason."

"I should then, if I were you. I've got a spot of work to do, but I'll be very quiet when I come upstairs, and not disturb you."

"Thank you, Roger. Good night."

"Good night, Moira. Sleep well"